

**PLAYS
OF
THE
YEAR**

26

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PLAYS OF THE YEAR

EDITED BY
J. C. TREWIN

RATTLE OF A SIMPLE MAN

Charles Dyer

*THE DOUBLE DECEIT; OR, A
CURE FOR JEALOUSY*

William Popple

JACKIE THE JUMPER

Gwyn Thomas

*A CHEAP BUNCH OF NICE
FLOWERS*

Edna O'Brien

VOLUME 26

1962-1963

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RATTLE OF A SIMPLE MAN

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JACKIE THE JUMPER

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A CHEAP BUNCH OF NICE FLOWERS

© Edna O'Brien 1963

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INTRODUCTION

"I do not claim that they are the best plays of their period; I submit merely that all are good of their kind, and that they share qualities for which a true theatregoer looks."

*(Preface to Plays of the Year, Volume One, 1949)**

I

Our twenty-sixth volume contains a long-running comedy by a new author; a rediscovery from well over two centuries ago; a play from Wales by one of the most gifted of the Royal Court dramatists, Gwyn Thomas; and a touching narrative of a mother-daughter relationship in Dublin. The plays come from the West End stage (the Garrick), the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, the Royal Court Theatre and the New Arts Theatre Club.

The title of the first†, RATTLE OF A SIMPLE MAN, is one of those things designed to tease. It refers to a red and white rattle, an instrument whirled at a football match. The owner, a simple man, scarfed and rosetted, is down (or up) from Lancashire to London for a game his team—not that it matters—has lost. Round about midnight he finds himself in the flat of someone who seems

* See also Introductions to *Plays of the Year*, Volumes 23 and 25.

† It has since been produced in New York.

to be a highly professional woman of the streets. Ginger, it seems, had bet him fifty pounds that he wouldn't; he was obstinately resolved to prove that he would. But now that he has arrived, courage ebbs. The play shows how two lonely people, for she is as lonely as he, get to understand each other. I have often objected to over-economical dramatists and plays with small casts, but this one is true and amusing: both its people live. Though there is a third part, the girl's brother, we remember this as a two-character play, the story of the girl with her fantasies and the man who is excellently true to form.

Sheila Hancock as the prostitute, a fugitive from a deplorable family, and Edward Woodward, embarrassed visitor, held the stage in a production by Donald McWhinnie that was unobtrusively just. Mr. Woodward had the right simple-man bluntness. Miss Hancock enjoyed immensely the young woman's irritation, bewilderment, springing inventions, and growing affection.

II

It would be pleasant to pretend that I know everything about the works of William Popple. "Of course," I ought to say airily, "we all remember the line—how does it go?—'Perceptive Popple by the Muses wooed.' Surely there is no need for me to repeat what Gay said to Rich, or what Rich said to Popple, or what Fielding said to all of them?"

Good; but being caught, cheerfully, at a disadvantage, I have to admit that, until a night at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in October, 1962, Popple and his highly undemocratic comedy, *THE DOUBLE DECEIT*, had been little more to me than names in an index; and only one index at

that. I agree: a pleasant name: a sound that might be made by goldfish as they popple round their garden pool, but not a name of which the average playgoer can have much idea. Still, I am hoping now that, after nearly 230 years (since the date of *THE DOUBLE DECEIT* at Covent Garden; staged 1735 and 1736; published in the second year), Popple may grow more familiar. The comedy that, thanks to the enterprise of John Harrison, Artistic Director of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, has returned to the stage from a micro-film of a rare copy, is a welcome addition to our early eighteenth century experience. So little is done from this century after its first few years—just a dozen plays or so besides those of Sheridan and, Goldsmith long islanded as Old Comedy. Popple is a change: the new production had the sense of discovery that Sir Barry Jackson would have applauded. I felt that the Founder was with us at the Repertory première.

I say that Popple is a change. Let me add that he sets new words to an old tune. These names—Gaylife, Bellair, Mrs. Plyable, Widow Lettwell, Richly—are labels firmly gummed to their period. Tendrils of the plot are not unknown to us. We have heard of masters that change places with their men (“Thou shalt be master, Tranio, in my stead”) and mistresses that change with their maids. But it is agreeably wholesale, as well as symmetrical, to have the game of love played by eight young people in disguise.

Clearly, in *THE DOUBLE DECEIT; OR, A CURE FOR JEALOUSY*—let us have the full title—Popple enjoyed himself. He added a jealous lover, with a young woman disguised as a man to pursue her. Moreover, there is a widow landlady who, in a later world, would have sharpened the suspicions of Mr. Weller senior. The manoeuvres

and counter-manoeuvres and sallies and withdrawals are most divertingly in period. In one way it was strange at the première not to know what might happen next in an Old Comedy. "Egad, brother! I cannot see my north star that I must sail by. Expectation racks me. If thou art in as bad case as I am, hold up thy finger." (I wonder who wrote that?)

There is not much to examine through a historical microscope. The piece is gentle, lucid, decorative. You may be reminded with pleasure of those goldfish that popple in their lily ponds. One thing further. The disguised masters will not marry the mistresses in disguise until the girls' true station has been established; the disguised gentlemen's gentlemen must bear with philosophy the grief of being cheated of supposed heiresses. It was too early yet for the stage to be democratic and revolutionary. (The last passage is, in sum, Professor Allardyce Nicoll's. Many writers, in the style of a programme credit, might add to their essays "Erudition by Nicoll".)

If this is neither Sheridan nor Goldsmith, snug in their reserved compartments, we can see how Popple's characters show the path to the Absolutes and the Marlows. There is a father of the period, ready for a scamper and with a plaguy disinheriting countenance. And if we ask what Popple is trying to say, we can merely suggest the sentiment (distorted by a later poet) that booty is truth, truth booty. It is all, as somebody murmurs, prettily realized, a good scheme of pleasure; and at Birmingham it was acted uncommonly well. When anybody says "Popple" to me in future, I shall be ready with the reply: "Of course—that is the comedy in which the *gouvernante* says: 'Your cousin Violetta is waiting for you. She has been here these two days, disguised in men's clothes'."

III

We printed Gwyn Thomas's fine comedy, The Keep, in Volume 24. Now here is JACKIE THE JUMPER in which Mr. Thomas, who uses words as if he loves them, not as counters to be allotted distastefully to his cast, writes of the disturbed Wales of the eighteen-thirties: a world where the workers were held between two fires, those of the great iron furnaces and of fanatical Puritanism. Seeking to present the full face of sensuality, rebellion, and revivalism, he shows how Jackie, the subversive, wandering hedonist, the "expendable pagan" who can spread disaffection among sheep, the man of character so loose that he has to turn back every five minutes to pick it up, rouses the townsfolk against the law, the militia, and the employers, but discovers (in a scene richly contrived for the theatre) that authority is strong and the mob fickle.

Again we have the extraordinary gift of phrase. JACKIE THE JUMPER holds us with its swirl of language, its sudden lyrical passages, its modulations into balladry. Blessed with this verbal gift, Gwyn Thomas is quite the most arresting of the new dramatists. John Dexter directed JACKIE at the Royal Court with the proper glow; and Ronald Lewis could always enforce our attention.

IV

A CHEAP BUNCH OF NICE FLOWERS was a relentless, moving, and unlooked-for experience. I went to the New Arts as a matter of routine. When I left the theatre I knew Edna O'Brien had added something to memory. Her Dublin narrative of the relationship between a doomed mother and a girl beset by fantasy had a stinging force,

and I doubt whether, in the context, the acting of Eithne Dunne, Susannah York, and Marie Kean (Irish maidservant) could have been improved. Miss York's accent may have been wayward; her perception was unflawed. As for Miss Dunne, I can say simply that Troilus has something about "vas-salage at unawares encountering the eye of majesty." I was ready to be cast as the encounterer.

J. C. TREWIN

Hampstead,

June 1963

RATTLE OF A
SIMPLE MAN

by
CHARLES DYER

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Michael Codron presented *Rattle of a Simple Man* at the Garrick Theatre, London, on September 19, 1962, with the following cast :

CYRENNE	<i>Sheila Hancock</i>
PERCY	<i>Edward Woodward</i>
RICARD	<i>Daniel Moynihan</i>

Directed by Donald McWhinnie

Setting by Vic Symonds

The part of Percy was later taken over by John Colin.

Later, on April 17, 1963, David Merrick presented this play at the Booth Theatre, New York, with the following cast :

CYRENNE	<i>Tammy Grimes</i>
PERCY	<i>Edward Woodward</i>
RICARD	<i>George Segal</i>

Directed by Donald McWhinnie

Setting by Vic Symonds

CHARACTERS

CYRENNE

PERCY

RICARD

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Somewhere in London is Cyrenne's basement flat and the play is enacted therein during an autumn night of the present year.

ACT ONE

Eleven o'clock on a Saturday night.

ACT TWO

About twenty minutes to twelve.

ACT THREE

Shortly after midnight.

ACT ONE

Cyrenne's flat is little more than a bed-sitter, but it is pleasant enough and quite posh; although the hanging light, which originally shone over the bed, has a piece of string pulling it to above the dressing-table. There are one or two slap-dash touches like this.

A basement atmosphere is obtained by the large window, centre of the wall left, and through here may be seen steps leading to the pavement above.

Outside, a car-door slams; a taxi drives away. By the light from a street lamp, we see two persons descending the area steps. Really, we see only their legs—which pause half-way.

CYRENNE : Steady now, love. They're awfully steep. Perhaps you'd better wait until I've opened up. Or are you going to run out on me?

PERCY : No! (*then a shade less definitely*) No, of course not.

[Cyrenne gives a half laugh and moves from the window's view. We hear her key at the front door lock; then she comes into the room, switching on the lights.]

The bed is a centre-piece. A door down left, near the window, leads to a dressing room and toilet; and on the right side of the room, up three steps, is a curtained opening which leads into a tiny cluttered kitchen.]

ACT ONE

hearted tart; nor is her voice scraping or scrunchy. She speaks nicely; and she is beautiful to see. Cyrenne is real—very real. And her moods are complex. In turn she is haughty, kindly; mocking, inviting, or choosy; tempestuous or cold; earthy or prim; she is all these things. Her age could be twenty; but she might be as old as . . . oh, as any other woman!]

Come along! Kettle's on.

[She has gone into the kitchen and lit the gas under a kettle. Now she clicks on an electric fire, with her toe. Next she turns on a record-player—quiet, soothing music; then she returns to the window and beckons.]

Come on, love! Shan't eat you.

[Percy's legs move down the steps, and he comes into the room as Cyrenne is drawing the curtains. Percy is an ordinary fellow, seeming about thirty-five. He has comic phases, some conscious and some unconscious—but he is far from being a clown. He is not really simple—he knows only too well his own limitations; and he uses an intense pride, a rocky dignity, to hide his sad fear that nobody wants or needs him. It takes a long time for his great natural charm and yearning friendliness to break through.]

Did you want a cup of tea, love?

PERCY: Er . . . no, I'm not bothered. Thanks all the same.

CYRENNE: Oh, all right.

[Percy has been celebrating some sporting event—

RATTLE OF A SIMPLE MAN

as we see by his multi-coloured scarf, rosette and rattle; but he is not drunk—just muzzy. Now, as Cyrenne busies herself in the kitchen he takes in his surroundings and giggles to himself.]

PERCY: What a thing, eh! Jemima, what a . . . ooogh. (*He sways slightly, placing a hand to his brow; then, with much less bravado:)* Streuth! What a thing!

[Cyrenne returns and places her ear-rings on the dressing-table. Next she un-zips her frock and steps out of it, wearing panties and a bra.]

Percy is standing left, clutching the rattle. He throws it on to the bed with a nervous laugh, when Cyrenne looks at him. Then he thrusts his hands deep into his raincoat pockets and examines the carpet around his feet.]

Don't we sort of talk or anything?

CYRENNE: Why?

[She un-plugs the record-player with her toe. The music stops.]

PERCY: Well, you know . . . I only thought . . . well . . . you know.

CYRENNE (*quizzically*): Change of heart, love?

PERCY (*bravely*): No! Not at all. I'm game for anything. (*He thrusts his hands even deeper into his pockets and edges half a step away.*)

CYRENNE: And anything goes, eh love? (*Folds her arms.*) A spoonful of life; daring week-end in the wicked city?

PERCY: I've been in London before. Many times.

ACT ONE

CYRENNE : Never done this before, though, have you !

PERCY (*defensively*) : Yes.

CYRENNE : Have you ?

PERCY : Yes. 'Course I have !

CYRENNE (*smiles*) : Scout's Honour ? Okey-doke.

[She slides across the bed to his side . . . and yelps humorously when she momentarily sits on the rattle.]

Now she helps him off with his raincoat and places it, with his scarf on a chair.]

Are you married ?

PERCY : Um . . . no.

CYRENNE (*looks at him*) : No, you're not. Go on ! I shan't look.

[She turns down the coverlet; and, without looking, passes the rattle to him.]

Who won, incidentally ?

PERCY : Oh, don't ask ! It was horrible. I reckon somebody covered the ball in grease; and as for the teams, they were so dead they should've carried flowers.

[Silence for a while. Cyrenne moves round the bed and turns down the other edge of the coverlet. Percy sneaks a quick look at her.]

Of course, the ground was too hard. Frosty.

[He clears his throat. She looks up at him.]

RATTLE OF A SIMPLE MAN

CYRENNE : Don't be shy !

PERCY : I'm not ! I've seen hundreds of women.

CYRENNE : I've seen hundreds of men.

PERCY : I suppose you must have ; although you're not quite what I imagined . . . not at all.

[Percy takes his hands out of his pockets, then puts them back again. Cyrenne crosses to him.]

Few months ago, a gang of us were up in Morecambe. Phew ! Saw a proper game there . . . only . . . local teams . . .

[His voice dies away as Cyrenne takes off his tie.]

CYRENNE : It's Percy, isn't it ?

PERCY : Yes. Percy Winthram. I'm from Manchester.

CYRENNE : Mine's Cyrenne. I was down in Manchester once : on a modelling job for one of the big stores.

PERCY : It'd be Lewis's in Market Street.

CYRENNE (*placing his tie on the chair*) : May go down again some time.

PERCY : Up. You go up to Manchester.

CYRENNE : Well, as long as you get there. (*Takes off his jacket.*) It's a nice suit.

PERCY : It's my best. S'quite good quality.

CYRENNE (*sudden thought*) : You do have money ?

PERCY : 'Course I have. Plenty.

CYRENNE : With you ?

PERCY : Yes. I brought out thirty pounds this morning.

CYRENNE : You won't need all that, Percy, unless you're staying the week.

ACT ONE

[*She lays his jacket on the chair, then crosses to the bed-end and sits to put on her slippers.*]

PERCY : I've to be back on Monday morning. Win or lose, I promised I'd take Mother to . . . (*He stops.*)

CYRENNE (*not unkindly*) : All have mothers, don't you ! Behind every man is a Ma.

PERCY : Oh, that doesn't hold me back. I act like I please, don't worry ! I'm . . . I'm thirty-five, you know.

CYRENNE : Oh, you must be : to have seen so many women.

[*Cyrenne watches him steadily. Percy lowers his eyes to the floor, and unfastens one shirt button. This takes ages.*]

Would you rather I got ready first?

PERCY : No ! No, I er . . . I . . .

CYRENNE : One of us must make a move, dear. Take your pick !

PERCY : It . . . it just seems so cold-blooded like this.

CYRENNE : It's a matter of time, though, isn't it ? We can't meet the family and go walks together all in one smoggy hour. But *I* don't mind : nobody's forcing you to make love. If you prefer, I'll make a pot of tea and when you're ready you can scoot.

PERCY : I'm not . . . (*He stops.*)

CYRENNE : Not what?

PERCY : Not . . . not paying for nothing.

CYRENNE (*rises; flashing*) : Now stop that, lovey ! You pay for my time. I don't give a damn how you spend it; but you pay for it ! (*She dons her dressing-gown.*)

RATTLE OF A SIMPLE MAN

PERCY : Oh, I feel umpty. I really do. (*sitting on the bed*) I've a head like a rocket-tail at blast-off. Oooo . . . (*He lies full length.*)

CYRENNE : Well ! What a come-down ! Shaking his rattle ; throwing his hat in the air ! "See you to-morrow, lads ! Don't tell Mother ; you'll make Dad jealous ! Up the Wrens !" . . . Marvellous !

[*Crossing to the door, she locks it and pockets the key.*]

I get the cash ; and you get the key.

PERCY : Could I have a glass of cold water, please ?

CYRENNE : Everybody's Romeo ! Read next week's sizzling instalment ! Oh lady, you do pick 'em. And don't be sick over my bed. (*She fills a glass of water from the kitchen tap.*)

PERCY (*sitting up*) : I'm not that bad : glass of water and I'll be fine. Where did the rest of the lads go ? Back to the digs ?

CYRENNE : I've no idea ; but you'd better think up some killer-diller tales : they're expecting great things from you.

[*She hands him the glass of water.*]

. . . Especially the one with red hair.

PERCY : That's Ginger . . . I mean, we call him Ginger. Did he go with the others ?

CYRENNE : Maybe . . . after he fell off the taxi. (*Sits at her dressing-table.*) He hung on the back for half a mile, yelling merry hell.

PERCY : I'm sorry if I've caused you any inconvenience.

CYRENNE : S'all part of the racket. What's the time ?

PERCY : Quarter past eleven.

ACT ONE

[*Cyrenne makes a note in her diary.*]

Why?

CYRENNE : Income tax. (*She grins; then gurgles merrily at his expression.*)

PERCY : Why do you do this sort of thing, Cyrenne?

CYRENNE (*brushing her hair*) : What sort of thing?

PERCY : Well . . . you know, live like you do. Oh, I imagine everyone asks you that.

CYRENNE : Usually bank managers who are writing plays; or bible-punchers with helping hands . . . one of those calls every Thursday, with pale watery eyes, and begs to hear my problems. Oh, brother!

PERCY : He may be a kindly person who's genuinely interested in your welfare.

CYRENNE (*meekly*) : Yes, Percival : like the time he asked me to undress while he listened.

PERCY : Well, there was only genuine interest in *my* question. I'm not . . . not perverted or anything. I've no problems.

CYRENNE (*meaningly*) : No?

PERCY : Now listen, miss. It was you approached me. You spoke to me in that club. *You* suggested this.

CYRENNE (*shrugs*) : It didn't stop you coming.

PERCY : Only because I was merry. I was a bit merry. And now, if you must know, I'm very ashamed.

CYRENNE (*flings down her hair brush*) : Oh, you're ashamed!

PERCY : Yes. I feel awful about it.

[*Cyrenne rises angrily. She goes for Percy's jacket, scarf and raincoat . . . hurls them on to the bed; then returns to her stool.*]

RATTLE OF A SIMPLE MAN

CYRENNE : You're breaking my heart. Run and tell the "lads" all about your naughty night!

PERCY : You have the door-key.

[Cyrenne throws the key on the floor, and continues brushing her hair.]

Um . . . how er . . . how much do I pay?

CYRENNE : Auntie doesn't rob schoolboys. Leave a shilling and a piece of string on the mantelpiece.

PERCY : Why are you so peeved? *(He rises, bends to look for the key; and quickly flops down again. He rubs the back of his head, with a groan.)* Oh . . . don't keep brushing your hair! Must you?

CYRENNE : Oh, rich. *(She drops the brush and swings round.)* Are we married now or something?

Whatever would your mummy say?

PERCY : It was scratching the backs of my eyes.

[Cyrenne makes a sound of amusement. She rises, then hands him the glass of water from the floor by his feet.]

CYRENNE : Shall you tell Mother all about your naughty night?

PERCY : No.

CYRENNE : Aw! What about the "lads"? *(She imitates his accent on "lads".)* Shall you tell the lads?

PERCY : Probably.

CYRENNE : Everything? . . . exactly as it happened?

PERCY : I suppose so.

CYRENNE : It won't be very exciting, will it! Yes, I can just see that pub in Manchester tomorrow night. Yup! *(She slaps her thigh.)* There's Ginger an' Chalky an' Fred . . . and there's you in the

ACT ONE

middle, looking ashamed. "Eeee, I was so ashamed, Ginger" . . . says Percival. And Ginger says, "Eeee, I'm proud you were ashamed, Percival". Then all the gentlemen join hands and yell: "Good old Percy! Pass the Bible!"

PERCY: I must've offended you. I'm sorry if I did.
CYRENNE (*sitting beside him on the bed-end*): What will you say about me?

PERCY: I'll say . . . (*He changes his mind and sips water.*)

CYRENNE (*quietly*): Yes, think about it. I often do . . . with fellows like you. Do they say "I'm glad I didn't" . . . people like you, Percy? Or has the story grown by tomorrow? Dark brown chuckles and nudges in the ribs: "Ho ho! What a night, chaps! What a night!"

[*Percy sips his water doggedly; but she nudges him.*]

. . . Percy?

PERCY: We-ell . . . (*Rising, he puts his tumbler on the table.*) . . . You see, I've never talked about things of . . . well, with a lady. I mean, you're so brassy with it.

CYRENNE: Won't you be brassy with Ginger?

PERCY: That's between men.

CYRENNE: And this is between people. Aren't men people?

PERCY: Yes, but . . . oh! D'you have an aspirin handy?

CYRENNE: You still haven't told me how I come off in the expurgated edition. You know, the one you'll be so ashamed of.

PERCY (*hotly*): Very well, I'll tell them the truth. I'll say I'm no good; I'm a flop. Satisfied?

RATTLE OF A SIMPLE MAN

CYRENNE : Then you've no call to be ashamed.

[*She finds a bottle of aspirins in a tallboy drawer and brings them to him.*]

PERCY : There is a path between my ears full of little men with hammers.

[*He takes aspirins with a sip of water. Cyrenne drops a packet of cigarettes on the table beside him.*]

CYRENNE : Help yourself.

PERCY : No, thanks. I'm all smoked out. You know, you're a strange one, Cyrenne. I come here to . . . well, to . . . and end up with some kind of lecture.

CYRENNE : I'm intelligent . . . do you mind? It so happens I've travelled the world and I speak three languages. I passed through college with Honours. I'm an M.A. . . . if you wish me to boast.

PERCY : That's very good. Very good indeed.

CYRENNE : My father was a brigadier in the Army. I was raised among people like that. Thirty pounds ! I've spent more than your thirty pounds on . . . on a hat. (*grandly*) Or a sudden whim, believe me !

PERCY : Don't reckon any hat's worth thirty pounds. (*He meanders to the kitchen stairs, rubbing his hands briskly.*) I didn't half drink some stuff tonight. Phew ! I wondered if, um . . . (*He stops.*) I wondered if . . .

CYRENNE : What, love? (*Lounging on the bed.*)

PERCY : Nothing. (*He peers into the kitchen.*) Is that a cupboard or something?

CYRENNE (*smiles faintly*) : No.

PERCY : Oh.

CYRENNE (*blandly*) : Why?

ACT ONE

PERCY : Nothing. I just wondered.

CYRENNE : I own this house : bought the mortgage. If I wished I could move upstairs. Just haven't bothered.

PERCY : You're lucky. Wish I owned a house.

[He opens the main door, and looks into the small corridor beyond. Then he closes the door and points to the bathroom door.]

PERCY : Another room in there?

CYRENNE (*twinkling*) : Yes.

PERCY : Bathroom, is it?

CYRENNE : No. (*She lies back on the bed.*)

PERCY : Oh. (*He rubs his hands.*)

CYRENNE : It's for luggage and odds and ends. A kind of dressing-room . . . There's a bathroom on the other side of it.

PERCY : Oh ! Would you excuse me, please.

[He exits, rubbing his hands.]

Cyrenne laughs to herself and rises. Picking up the key, she is about to replace it in the front door; then she pauses, weighing it thoughtfully in her hands. On an impulse she moves to her dressing-table and puts her key in a powder bowl.

Now she takes the rosette from Percy's raincoat and pins it on her dressing-gown. She admires the effect in her mirror; then puts his scarf round her neck; collects his rattle from the tallboy and moves centre, twirling it. As Cyrenne sits on the bottom corner of the bed, Percy re-enters.]

PERCY : You could have said straight away.

RATTLE OF A SIMPLE MAN

CYRENNE : You could have asked straight away.

PERCY : It's not the sort of thing a gentleman does.
(*He puts on his tie.*)

CYRENNE : Up in Manchester?

PERCY : Anywhere.

CYRENNE : Oh, we do it all the time in London.

PERCY : You're just trying to make me look silly. You've been acting clever since I came. I admit I was wrong . . . somewhere along the line; but you did invite me here in the first place. (*He dons his jacket and throws his raincoat over a shoulder.*) Could I have my things, please?

[*She gives him the scarf and rattle, then pats the rosette.*]

CYRENNE : Souvenir for Cyrenne?

PERCY : Mm? Oh. Yes. Yes, please have it. Oh . . . I'm not quite sure what we decided . . . with regard to terms.

[*Cyrenne ponders with assumed gravity.*]

CYRENNE : Oh, I think, all details being taken into consideration and with due regard to the culminating factors, we may safely assume . . . it's on the house!

PERCY (*laughs uncertainly*) : Oh. Thank you very much.

CYRENNE : Not at all. (*She waves her hand in the air and lies back on the bed.*)

PERCY : Well! I've enjoyed our little chat.

[*He moves to the door and turns.*]

I er . . . I may not be up in London for some while.

ACT ONE

CYRENNE : Down!

PERCY : Pardon? Oh, yes : down in London. Been quite exciting . . . everything and all . . . And thanks for the glass of water and the aspirins. I can see that you're um . . . well, a very nice kind of person.

CYRENNE : Underneath it all.

PERCY : No! I mean it! I've never talked to anyone quite so interesting. You don't meet many girls that are . . . that are, you know, original. And you are! . . . Anyway . . .

[He pauses quite a while with his hand on the door-knob. Then he comes back to Cyrenne, who is lying with her head hanging over the end of the bed and following a pattern on the carpet with her fingers.]

You don't suppose Ginger could've . . . no, you say he fell off the taxi. *(He goes back to the door; then returns with a fresh thought.)* Some of the other lads, though . . . maybe they're hanging around . . . waiting to see how I got on. Could be, you know. And . . . well, I've been so . . . so quick. You see?

CYRENNE : But we've nothing to be ashamed of . . . have we?

PERCY : Oh . . . no. No. *(He moves to the door, then turns again.)* I er . . . I work in a cotton mill back home : in the research department, testing different tensilities; working on improved fabrics, you know. Nothing exactly scientific, but um . . . Are you listening?

CYRENNE : Yes.

PERCY *(moves down)* : Hey! D'you know, I might've had something to do with that very dressing-gown you're wearing.

CYRENNE (*gravely*): Sort of makes you stop and want to think.

PERCY: Yes. (*Shakes his head sadly.*) You know, Cyrenne, we come down here every year; and yet . . . once Saturday's finished, it's always dead for me. And tomorrow there's only the coach station—cold, early and Sunday-ish; chaps bragging about the women they've met, the beer they've drunk; then the long drive home with a headache . . . Not that I'm grumbling, you understand! There's always the girl friend, you know. Oh, I've a nice girl friend. Oh yes. I'm a happy man. I'm a very happy man. (*He looks at his watch.*) Hey, d'you know it's only half-past eleven?

CYRENNE: It is?

PERCY: Yes. It's early. Look . . . I'm not begging any favours, you know; but c-could . . . could I stay a bit longer, please? . . . as a friend . . . just to talk?

[*Cyrenne raises her head and looks at him. Then suddenly she swings off the bed and moves to the tallboy. From a drawer she takes a blouse. Throwing off her dressing-gown, she puts on the blouse. Then:*]

CYRENNE: I may have people calling.

PERCY: Oh. Oh, I see.

CYRENNE: My sister and her husband.

PERCY (*brighter*): Oh.

CYRENNE: He's a brilliant surgeon. They often call in for an hour. Sometimes they bring a whole crowd and we have a party. My sister's husband is very large: much broader than you and he's tall with it. Nice man. I like him. Always decent with me. They're charming people, all of them.

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[She takes the rosette from her dressing-gown and holds it against her blouse, surveying herself in the mirror.]

PERCY : They sound very nice. Very nice.

CYRENNE : They're not bound to call. 'Tisn't a definite arrangement. No! Doesn't match the blouse!

[Cyrenne throws the rosette into a waste basket and hurries out of the door left.]

PERCY : Hey! That was meant as a keepsake : not to be thrown away. *(He crosses to the waste basket and retrieves his rosette.)* I'll have it back, seeing you're so pernickety. *(He moves to the door left and shouts:)* Best of luck to you, anyway!

[He strides to the main door; stops; then walks slowly back again.]

(shouts) I'll be off then. O.K.? . . . Are you listening?

[Suddenly Cyrenne reappears, wearing skin-tight black trousers. She goes to the dressing-table and picks up her diary.]

What if they *don't* call?

CYRENNE : Someone's always popping in.

PERCY : You're not . . . going out again?

CYRENNE : No. *(She lies on the bed, toes on the pillow, and reads her diary.)*

PERCY : Would you mind my stopping until somebody did call?

[*Cyrenne sighs indifferently and turns a page.*]

. . . Would you?

CYRENNE : Would I what?

PERCY (*irritably*) : Can I stay until someone calls?

CYRENNE : Shouldn't you go to your hotel-or-what-ever-it-is and sober up?

PERCY : Who's drunk? I was never anything more than mellow . . . just a happy glow.

[*Cyrenne turns another page.*]

Aw, I'm so walked-on I'm getting a matt finish !

[*Huffily he strides to the door; finds it locked; and strides back again. He paces the bed area, muttering darkly, and then goes on his knees to look under the bed-end. Cyrenne leans her head right over, close to his, and asks innocently:*]

CYRENNE : Lost something?

PERCY : The key. You tossed it down. I can't see it.

CYRENNE : Hmm! You'd better go through the window. (*She returns to her diary.*)

PERCY : Climb through?

CYRENNE : You could take a running jump.

PERCY : Through the window!

CYRENNE : Yes . . . open it first.

[*Percy goes to the window.*]

. . . And bring back a locksmith.

PERCY : At this hour! All we need is to unscrew that plate. I could do it in five minutes if you've a screw-driver.

CYRENNE : D'you expect me to spend five minutes

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with a screw-driver each time anyone calls?

PERCY : Well, you threw it on the floor! (*He pulls aside the curtains.*) Hey, there're bars on the window!

CYRENNE : Squeeze through!

PERCY : Squeeze . . . ! A python'd be hard pressed.

[*Cyrenne flops back and, taking the weight on her shoulders, thrusts her legs up high. Then she does développés and entrechats in the air. Percy turns and watches her.*]

You have um . . . you have a very nice figure.

CYRENNE : I'm glad you like it.

PERCY : Quite . . . quite nice hair, too.

[*Cyrenne folds down into a sitting position. She smiles and nods towards the kitchen.*]

CYRENNE : Go put the kettle on!

PERCY : You mean . . . ? Oh, thanks! Yes, thank you very much. Ta. I'm most appreciative, I really am. (*He hangs his coat and scarf over the kitchen banisters.*) Be all right here, will it?

CYRENNE (*surveys it lazily*) : Move it . . . um, slightly to the left.

PERCY (*does so; then stops*) : Why?

CYRENNE : Oh, it'll probably be all right.

PERCY : You don't half say some odd things, you do really.

[*He moves into the kitchen and fills the kettle at the sink. Cyrenne rises and looks at herself in the dressing-table mirror. She smooths her hands down her body.*]

CYRENNE : There's a tin of biscuits above your head and some blue cheese in the cupboard. Shall we have that?

PERCY : Oogh, yes. I am a bit peckish. (*He reaches down the transparent plastic biscuit tin.*) Have you any more biscuits? There's only two.

CYRENNE : One each. Lovely!

PERCY : Oh. Yes.

[*Cyrenne moves into the kitchen and stands watching as Percy prepares a tray with cheese, biscuits, butter and so forth.*]

CYRENNE : My family home had a huge stone-flagged kitchen. Oh, it was a mansion, really . . . in Hampshire. As a child I remember the daffodils reaching my waist; and my arms wouldn't meet around the great white pillars of the portico. A white gleaming mansion; and we called it "Old Wob". I couldn't count the servants we had . . . old Pickles the butler; old Ned the chauffeur.

[*Percy is rinsing two cups under the tap.*]

PERCY : I once stayed on a farm . . . Oh! I've wet your rent book.

[*He takes a rent book from its hook above the sink and hands it to Cyrenne. She places it on a shelf over the cooker.*]

CYRENNE : It's not mine; but thank you. My father was such a handsome man; so distinguished. You had to respect as well as love him.

PERCY : I imagine everyone respects a brigadier. Is he dead, then?

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CYRENNE (*nods*): He left all his money to my brother and me. My brother owns a country club.

PERCY: You're not half well connected! Was there much in the way of money? . . . if you'll pardon me asking.

CYRENNE: Ten thousand.

PERCY (*whistles*): A small fortune.

CYRENNE: It soon goes.

PERCY: No doubt you spent a lot buying this house.

CYRENNE: No, a man bought this for me. (*She stretches against the wall.*) I could've had much more, but . . . well, you know.

PERCY (*he disapproves*): I see.

[*The kettle whistles. Cyrenne turns off the gas.*]

No! I'll do it, Cyrenne. I'll serve up. You go and sit down. Go on!

[*Cyrenne seems surprised. She backs away to the doorway.*]

Go on! Scoot!

[*Cyrenne walks meekly to the end of the bed and sits, waiting. Percy pours water into the teapot.*]

I must remember what Mother's always saying: pot to the kettle, never kettle to the pot. Oogh, marvellous. It'll run round the room, this tea.

[*He throws a towel over his arm, waiter-fashion; takes the teapot in one hand, the tray in his other; turns off the light with his shoulder and goes to sit beside Cyrenne.*]

RATTLE OF A SIMPLE MAN

You know, I'm almost feeling healthy again. Must have been those aspirins. Mind you, my tongue still tastes like an old bath mat.

CYRENNE : Butter me a biscuit.

PERCY : Oh . . . All right. (*He does so.*) Do you have normal meals?

[*Cyrenne bursts out laughing.*]

What's up? . . . What's the matter?

CYRENNE : No. They supply us with special food.

PERCY : I didn't mean it that way.

CYRENNE : . . . Extra vitamins. Technicolored pills.

PERCY : I simply meant, well, some people . . . here's your biscuit.

CYRENNE : What about the cheese?

PERCY : Do your own cheese. You'll expect me to eat it next.

CYRENNE (*smiles*) : Sorry.

[*Percy butters his own biscuit, keeping his eyes to the task. Cyrenne bends her head down and looks at him.*]

Sorry, love.

PERCY : You've nothing to be sorry for. I'm not sulking, you know. I don't sulk.

CYRENNE : Here! (*She cuts him a piece of cheese.*)

PERCY : Ta. (*Takes it.*) You see, it's hard to think of something to say without a double meaning . . . in the circumstances, so to speak. And we are in . . . well . . . peculiar circumstances.

CYRENNE (*gravely*) : Oh yes.

PERCY : I start to say something and all my sentences end in dots. When a character in a book sort

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of hesitates, you get dot-dot-dot-dot-dot. That's how I am.

CYRENNE (*nods understandingly*): It's horrid for you.

PERCY: I suppose I'm just . . . (*he giggles a little*) . . . just dotty.

[*He laughs happily at this. Cyrenne smiles.*]

I always laugh at my own jokes. I'm the only one who does.

CYRENNE: Never mind.

[*A longish pause now while they munch their biscuits and cheese. Every so often he looks at her, then looks away when she returns his look.*]

PERCY: I hope I'm not keeping you up.

[*She shakes her head gravely, just managing not to laugh.*]

Is your mother still alive?

CYRENNE: . . . No.

PERCY: Ah. Perhaps she died when you were very young, then?

CYRENNE: Yes. Yes indeed. I was twelve.

PERCY: Did your dad look after you?

CYRENNE: We had a nanny.

PERCY: Oh, yes, of course.

CYRENNE: Father was always away fighting.

PERCY: Fighting who?

CYRENNE (*shrugs*): He was away doing something.

PERCY: What Regiment was your father, may I ask?

CYRENNE: Oh . . . Cavalry. I didn't see him much. I spent my time painting and writing. I wrote a

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book when I was fourteen . . . thirty chapters. When I was twelve I . . . (*she stops*) . . . something else happened. (*She rises suddenly.*) I think I'll wear my jewellery. Just for you, Percy. Let's dress up. (*She picks up the tray and hurries towards the kitchen.*)

PERCY : I'd have worn me medals if I'd known. (*He laughs.*)

CYRENNE : How d'you mean? (*She pauses in the kitchen opening, seeming strangely tense.*) What did you mean by that?

PERCY (*surprised*) : It was a joke . . . just a joke.

CYRENNE : Oh. (*She laughs uncertainly.*) Would you find my jewel box in the tallboy, please?

PERCY : Certainly.

CYRENNE (*calls*) : Oh, it may be the second drawer.

PERCY : What sort of box.

CYRENNE : A little white one.

[*Percy opens the second drawer and closes it again, standing away from it. Cyrenne crosses, opens the drawer and finds her jewel box. Percy doesn't quite know where to look. Watching him levelly, Cyrenne closes the drawer very slowly.*]

Don't say you're *that* green.

PERCY : I'm a bachelor, you know.

CYRENNE : Yes. Now then. (*Sorts through box.*) Yes, let's have this one.

[*Placing the box on the tallboy, she hands him a cheap necklace; then turns her back for him to fasten it on.*]

I used to have lots of these but I sold them. Don't like memories. (*Turns round.*) Nice?

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PERCY : Yes, it's all right.

CYRENNE : I feel like dancing. Can you?

PERCY (*irritably*) : Oh yes ! I used to run a dancing school.

CYRENNE (*laughs*) : Really?

PERCY (*shaking his head*) : I was joking. No, I wasn't even doing that. I was being sarcastic. Take no notice.

CYRENNE : Are you still embarrassed?

PERCY : Don't be soft. I've been around. No, it's the way you say things. It wasn't "Shall we dance" or "Let's dance", it was "Can you?"

CYRENNE (*sitting on the end of the bed*) : Not everybody *can* dance.

PERCY : Well, it so happens *I* can. You know, you make me feel as though I came up the Thames on a pogo stick. . . Well even if I did, it had a bell on. . . . Aw, forget it. I'm just grouching, I suppose . . . But each topic that crops up, you have a cupboardful : with your chauffeurs and white pillars, daffodils and Old Wob; brigadiers; money. You paint and you write. Thirty chapters at fourteen ! Phew ! I'm just about going under.

[*Cyrenne mooches to the dressing-table, hands behind her back.*]

CYRENNE : It wasn't a very good book : terribly immature.

PERCY : Premature 'd be a better word. Thirty chapters ! Takes me half an hour to sign a Christmas card.

CYRENNE : You do all this clever . . . research business.

PERCY : I only collate figures the boffins have

turned out. I collate them, you know. Oh, it's quite clever. I mean, I am clever at figures. But I don't suppose you'd want to spend the night adding figures together.

CYRENNE (*wickedly*) : Not on paper !

[*He says nothing to this, and she laughs.*]

PERCY : I know what you mean. It's all right . . . There's another thing ! I wouldn't dare say things to women at the mill that you say to me.

CYRENNE : You might have more fun if you did.

PERCY : I do very nicely, thank you. Oh, I realize it's very broad-minded and Bohemian but . . . Not that I'm a prude. Don't get me wrong ! I'm not a prude by a long chalk. I'm no angel. It's just that . . . Phew ! Early on I felt really exhilarated. It was the meshing . . . yes, the meshing of our personalities. But suddenly my ego's . . . well, it's squashed ; it's beat ; worse than that, it's bu . . . well, I won't be rude.

CYRENNE : Go on ! I dare you !

PERCY : You know what I mean.

CYRENNE (*agreeing*) : Mm. (*She sighs heavily, humorously.*)

PERCY : Oh, I'm no good with women. I'm like a chapel hat-peg. I'm everything the French laugh at in the English. (*He follows a pattern on the carpet with his feet.*) I told you a lie when I said I had a particular girl friend. I haven't. I know lots of girls . . . no I don't ! Lots know me, let's put it that way. I can't explain why I've no steady girl. I'm old enough. Just never got round to it, I suppose. I'm kept pretty busy most of the time. Friday there's a get-together with the lads. You know.

CYRENNE (*nods*) : The lads. (*She imitates his accent,*

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but without irony: kindly acceptance, if anything.)

PERCY : Yes. Saturday's darts; Wednesdays I spend with the Old Chilvingtons . . . grammar school; Mondays I go to the pictures; and there's always television if the worst comes to the worst. The week goes by. I don't especially need anyone else.

CYRENNE : It's a problem, isn't it !

PERCY : No ! That's what I'm explaining. I'm not moaning and whining, I'm just talking. Why don't you say something? I'm very well off on the quiet; nice bit in the bank; and I shall eventually go abroad for the firm. *(He fishes a squashed, empty cigarette packet out of his pocket.)* I shall have a secretary and a telephone.

CYRENNE : Take one of mine.

PERCY : No thanks. I'm still full of feathers. *(He examines his face in the dressing-table mirror.)* Beginning to need a shave, too.

CYRENNE *(rising)* : There's only washing soap, but I can supply the rest.

[She takes a razor from a dressing-table drawer.]

It is a new blade.

PERCY : Who does it belong to?

CYRENNE : Me.

PERCY : Why should you have a . . . oh. Um. It's kind of you, but I think I'll wait till morning. *(Backing hurriedly left.)*

CYRENNE : Your whiskers ! *(Replaces the razor.)*

PERCY : You don't want to watch me shaving.

CYRENNE : Yes, I do. I like it. It's manly.

PERCY : No, I prefer to wait, if you don't mind. I hate messing around in a shirt and collar. I like to strip off and get down to it.

RATTLE OF A SIMPLE MAN

CYRENNE : That's my boy! (*She smiles saucily.*)

PERCY (*near to blushing*) : Oh, you're too sexy by far!

CYRENNE : Isn't it expected of me?

PERCY : You're not so tough as you make out! (*He grins.*) Mind you, there is a sort of X Certificate in the air . . . I'm just kidding! But it *is* a strange feeling being here. I mean *me*! Oh, you wouldn't understand.

CYRENNE (*bristling*) : Because I'm different?

PERCY : Well yes, you must be. I mean, I shall have tonight's atmosphere with me for . . . oh, for . . . well, I'll tell you : the other week I saw a dog run over. Poor little dachshund, it was; just lay in the gutter, yelping and screeching; everyone stood round, hoping it'd die quickly. And the chap who owned it . . . must have been six foot four . . . beefy fella, he was crying like a baby. Apparently it was a very old dog he was taking to be put to sleep; but the poor little thing jumped right out of his arms under this truck. It was going to die anyhow . . . but to think it had to go like *that*! All its legs crushed. (*He shudders.*) I was cold inside for days. And yet tonight, after a fashion, I have the same kind of . . . *pungency*. Yes, that's the word. Pungency. But *you* wouldn't appreciate that.

CYRENNE : You think I have no feelings?

PERCY : Oh, yes, but our levels of sensitivity are . . .

CYRENNE (*angrily*) : Strange as it seems, I'm sad when a little dog dies.

PERCY : Yes, maybe, but . . .

CYRENNE : . . . I have salt in my tears just like you.

PERCY : I know. I know . . .

CYRENNE : Then ram this past your halo, Percy. I'm no different to anyone else. I eat ordinary food, wear my best clothes in church, and never read

ACT ONE

dirty books at breakfast. Forget the dishes. Just blow!

PERCY: You don't half take offence!

CYRENNE: Here's the key of the door. (*She takes it from the bowl.*) "The lads" are waiting!

PERCY: Did you have it all the time then?

[*Cyrenne covers her face with her hands.*]

Are you crying?

[*She shakes her head and gives a short defiant laugh. From the dressing-table she takes a woolly toy dog and holds it close to her cheek . . . as though it is an old friend when in need.*]

I shouldn't want to leave you . . . like this.

CYRENNE: Don't skin your nose! Everyone leaves me like this.

PERCY: I'll be happy to wash the pots, if you like.

CYRENNE: Some of them bluster, some of them swagger; but they mostly creep away.

PERCY: Or I'll attend to any odd jobs you may have outstanding. I'm in no hurry for an hour . . . if you have any squeaky floor boards . . . faulty light plugs . . . hinges that need oiling.

[*She doesn't answer.*]

I promise not to break anything.

[*Cyrenne laughs.*]

CYRENNE: "He's good for me, Momma. He's awful good." That's a line from a book I once read. It was a book about a family in the Deep South, a

family of rotters. All the Deep South families are rotters according to books and films. Have you noticed? Anyway, this girl used to get up in the morning, in the steaming heat, and throw on a thin cotton dress and run into the forest.

PERCY : Was it a film?

CYRENNE : Don't know; but she didn't wash or anything : and she never wore knickers. (*She lights a cigarette.*) I used to think it was terribly saucy, this teenage belle among all these sweaty men, guns, dogs . . . and no knickers. In one part she went swimming with a boy called Aaron; naturally they had no costumes either; and so she had a baby. Everyone hated Aaron because he wore boots or something; and when this baby came, the girl's brothers captured him in the forest.

PERCY : Yes, I think it was a film. I remember.

CYRENNE : . . . And two of them held him down while the others kicked him in the stomach. I gave myself a headache crying. Do you wear boots, Percy?

PERCY : Only for football.

CYRENNE : And for hiking? Are you the type who camps out in summer?

PERCY : I have done in my time, yes.

CYRENNE (*hands him an apron*) : Mind your nice suit ! Use the squeeze-in soap on the draining board.

PERCY : Oh lovely ! Right-you-are, then !

[*They both move into the kitchen. Cyrenne helps him tie the apron.*]

CYRENNE (*thoughtfully*) : Are you a scout master?

PERCY (*guiltily*) : What . . . what would be wrong in that?

CYRENNE : Nothing.

ACT ONE

[The telephone rings. Cyrenne goes into the living-room and lies on the bed to answer it.]

Yes?

BILL'S VOICE : Hullo, Cyrenna-mia !

CYRENNE : Hullo, Willie darling !

BILL : Darling yourself. How's tricks?

CYRENNE : All right; and you?

BILL : Got a cold.

[Cyrenne laughs intimately. In the kitchen, Percy listens jealously.]

CYRENNE : Well, you shouldn't run about with nothing on.

BILL : You suggested it.

CYRENNE : I did no such thing.

BILL : Strip poker was your idea.

CYRENNE : Oogh ! It was your idea. *(to Percy.)*

Don't break anything, will you, love?

BILL : Don't worry. I won't

CYRENNE : I wasn't talking to you, Willie.

BILL : Is someone there?

CYRENNE : Yes. Jealous?

BILL : Madly. Who is it?

CYRENNE : Mind your own business !

BILL : And you mind your p's and q's.

CYRENNE : That is my business.

[Again she laughs intimately. Percy is almost writhing with curiosity. He slides close to the kitchen doorway and strains to hear the faint croaking at the caller's end of the phone. Cyrenne glances up and sees him. He dodges out of sight; and she smiles.]

RATTLE OF A SIMPLE MAN

BILL : Feel like a party tonight?

CYRENNE : Go to a party *now*?

BILL : Yes. Now. Pronto.

CYRENNE : What sort of party?

BILL : Wild and expensive.

CYRENNE : What does "expensive" mean?

BILL : Come and find out.

CYRENNE : No, I'm all ready for bed.

BILL : In your working togs, then? Ha-ha!

CYRENNE : Very droll, sweetheart; the answer is still no.

BILL : You'd turn up a trip on a yacht?

CYRENNE : Yacht? What kind of yacht?

BILL : A real yacht. Lap lap.

CYRENNE : You're going on a yacht tonight?

BILL : Yes. Deep water! It's Teddy's at Maiden-head. You remember Teddy.

CYRENNE : I've never been to a party on a yacht. Hang on!

[Percy has been disappointed by the turn of the telephone conversation. Now Cyrenne masks the receiver with her hand.]

(to Percy) Do you really want to stay awhile?

PERCY : I don't want to stop you having . . .

CYRENNE : . . . I asked you if you wanted to stay.

PERCY : Yes. But, I mean . . .

CYRENNE : Whatever happens?

PERCY : How d'you mean?

[She smiles.]

CYRENNE *(into receiver)* : No go, Willie! My boyfriend won't let me.

PERCY : No, wait a minute . . . !

ACT ONE

CYRENNE : Ssssh ! (*into the receiver*) What did you say? . . . Oh, he's just a fella who does the washing up. G'bye. (*She replaces the receiver.*)

PERCY : Well ! It's very nice of you.

[*She rolls off the left side of the bed and picks up a tiny transistor radio from the bedside table.*]

CYRENNE : It was only a friend of mine who has a motor boat in Maidenhead.

PERCY : It might have been fun.

CYRENNE : I've been on the *Queen Mary*. Come on ! Let's dance ! Is that the correct phrase ?

PERCY : Well . . . there's all those dishes, you know.

CYRENNE : God ! D'you call that entertainment ? Come on, man ! I'm waiting.

[*By now she has switched on the radio, which is blaring gay music . . . loud and swingy. Percy moves to her and tentatively takes her arms. He breaks away immediately.*]

PERCY : It's no use. I can't. When the lads go dancing I stay in the bar.

CYRENNE : Well I'm damned ! (*She clicks off the radio and tosses it on the bed.*) We have one hell of a scene because I say something wrong . . . !

PERCY : Yes, well all right, I know ! So I told you a lie. I just wanted to be able to say I could do *something* . . . that's why.

[*Cyrenne crosses to the dressing-table and smooths her eyebrows at the mirror.*]

CYRENNE : I sacrificed champagne and oysters for you, love.

RATTLE OF A SIMPLE MAN

PERCY : Nobody twisted your arm. Why did you, anyway?

CYRENNE : Because I have clicking in the ears. I must have ! . . . Do you play tiddly winks?

PERCY : No, I don't play tiddly winks.

CYRENNE : You play darts, though.

PERCY : Yes. (*then eagerly*) Why, have you got a board?

CYRENNE : Oh, no !

PERCY : More funny stuff. Very droll.

[Cyrenne flops face down on to the bed. She feels the radio . . . and switches it on. Then she eases off the bed, carrying the radio, and sidles to Percy . . . twisting her body in time to the music.]

CYRENNE : Well, Percival . . . (*She stands very close to him.*) . . . what are we going to do?

PERCY : Well . . . as I said before, those dishes don't get any cleaner.

He backs away and hurries into the kitchen.

Cyrenne shrugs philosophically, turns the radio to full volume, and does a hot little dance all by herself.

In the kitchen, Percy steals a glance through the door. After a couple of seconds, he grits his teeth and tentatively tries a few shuffling steps. He has as much rhythm as an ancient gong; but it shows promise . . .

Curtain

ACT TWO

A few minutes later.

Cyrenne is teaching Percy to dance. The radio is playing and they circle the room quite successfully —until Percy makes a wrong move! Cyrenne breaks away, limping painfully.

CYRENNE : Damn and blast! (*She sits on the bed and rubs her foot.*)

PERCY : Sorry.

CYRENNE : You must have feet like a yeti!

PERCY : Sorry.

CYRENNE : I'm crippled.

PERCY : Sorry.

[The record ends and a foreign announcer jabbars away. Percy laughs.]

What's he saying?

CYRENNE : How should I know? Switch it off.

PERCY (*switches it off*) : I thought you spoke three languages.

CYRENNE : Only the swear-words.

PERCY : It sounded like French.

CYRENNE : Come and talk to me.

PERCY : All right.

CYRENNE : Yes?

PERCY : Yes what?

CYRENNE : Yes what!? Where are your manners?
"Yes pardon"!

[She tugs his arm and he sits beside her.]

Go on then! Start!

PERCY : Start what?

CYRENNE : Talking.

RATTLE OF A SIMPLE MAN

PERCY : You can't just start talking !

CYRENNE : Try ! Say "I run a cotton factory" . . .

PERCY : I don't. I just work there.

CYRENNE : By yourself, or are there lots of people ?

PERCY : Only about three thousand !

CYRENNE : All men ?

PERCY : Phew ! No ! Only a third are men.

CYRENNE : There ! We've started talking. Now, we have . . . oh, I can't add . . . say a thousand available women, at least. So, every day at the factory you rampage among a thousand juicy women.

PERCY : What's all this rampaging ?

CYRENNE : Why not ?

PERCY : I'm stuck in the lab most of the time.

CYRENNE : You stop for lunch.

PERCY : People don't rampage in the canteen ! D'you think we have some kind of orgy during lunch break ?

CYRENNE : Lovely !

PERCY : Anyway, what're you driving at ? I may not be going steady but I've taken girls out on dates. I've taken out plenty of girls.

CYRENNE : You've never slept with one.

[Percy is shocked. He gets to his feet.]

PERCY : Phew ! I reckon you'd walk into Marks & Spencer's and shout Woolworths ! You don't know what I've done.

CYRENNE : Don't you think it's time you did ?

PERCY : Who says I haven't ?

[Cyrenne smiles and shrugs.]

(capitulates) All right, I haven't ! I never have. So you can laugh ; laugh as much as you like.

ACT TWO

CYRENNE : I'm not laughing.

PERCY : No, well . . . ! (*He runs his fingers along the back of the arm-chair.*) I've had plenty of chances but I've never . . . followed them through. I don't have the technique so Bob's your uncle . . . May I have one of your cigarettes now?

CYRENNE : 'Course.

[*He takes a cigarette from her packet.*]

PERCY : I live with the family, you see. I must get somewhere on my own. Time I did. You can't take friends back home really : there's only the spare parlour; and even if I did, Mother'd make it a ceremony . . . fussing, bringing out the posh spoons, dressing up. I'm not grouching : me Mother's a wonderful woman. Wonderful. But I once took home a girl called Cherry; just a friend, nothing more. But what a palaver! There's me mother twittering away, nudging me father; little side-long looks at each other. I froze up. You see, you don't know if you want the posh spoons until . . . Anyway, I froze up.

CYRENNE : And Cherry?

PERCY (*grins*) : She crystallized ! I didn't see her for dust.

CYRENNE : And all these other dates?

PERCY : Well, if you've any advice it's most welcome, Cyrenne. Everything goes fine, you see, until near the end; then it's always the same . . . always the same long agonizing walk back to their gate. Truly agonizing, believe me ! Talk about a dumb-bell : it has blood compared to me ! I worry about this good-night kissing business all the way to the gate.

CYRENNE : Can't that wait till the next night?

RATTLE OF A SIMPLE MAN

PERCY : I'm afraid not. I never get a return match . . . No, it's the good-night kissing business. Mind you, I've done plenty of ordinary kissing : at parties and . . . well just at parties, I suppose. But when I reach that gate and she says "Thanks for a nice evening" or some such phrase; and I know she's expecting . . . expecting me to get romantic; and . . . aw, the whole thing goes to pot.

CYRENNE : A lot of men find . . . (*She changes her mind.*) Why don't you let yourself go for once?

PERCY : Ay, I did try for once! The girl laughed; and she said . . . (*he stops.*)

CYRENNE : Said what?

[*And this obviously hurt him deeply at the time.*]

PERCY : . . . she said "You'd better stick to training boy scouts, Percy". (*defensively*) Yes, you guessed right. I am a scout master. And I'm fed up feeling embarrassed when I tell people. Oh, life's a mess, it really is!

[*A slight pause.*]

CYRENNE : It'll sort itself out and . . .

PERCY : . . . Anyway, I even asked Ginger. He's a smooth type, you know. He has one dance with a girl then disappears with her. Half an hour later he comes back looking smug and satisfied. So I asked him straight out. I said, "What d'you say to a woman when you've got her to yourself?" "Come on," he said, "I'll show you." He stopped the first girl he met in the corridor, and started making love to her!

CYRENNE : In the corridor?

ACT TWO

PERCY : The neck of the man ! Fantastic ! Fantastic ! Even with me there he went so far as to tell . . . Still, I'll not repeat it.

CYRENNE : Why, was it rude ?

PERCY : Not really, but I can't tell *you*.

CYRENNE : Oh, come on, tell me.

PERCY (*squirming*) : Well . . . well, he said . . . "What . . . what beautiful breasts you have." Now I feel a chump for telling you. There's nothing in it, I realize that. Everyone's broad-minded today. They talk openly about things my grandmother would've fainted at.

CYRENNE : Look . . . (*She sighs.*) Percy, didn't your grandma have breasts ?

PERCY : Well . . . eh ?

CYRENNE : I know mine did. I remember she had a gigantic bust which entered a room several seconds before she did . . . She was proud of it. She was French ; a marchioness ; terribly old family. You're not old-fashioned, love ; you're unbelievable.

PERCY : Well, I think *my* grandmother would've fainted.

CYRENNE : God help your grandpa's honeymoon !

PERCY : All right, pull my leg !

CYRENNE : Is this what Ginger meant by "Remember the top half" ?

PERCY : When did he say that ?

CYRENNE : He yelled it several times before he fell off the taxi.

PERCY : That's Ginger all over.

CYRENNE : But not you anywhere. A shame ! (*She pops her head over his shoulder and asks huskily:*) Shall I order one pint of milk tomorrow, or two ?

PERCY : Milk ?

CYRENNE (*humorous sigh*) : I'm afraid one'll be enough.

RATTLE OF A SIMPLE MAN

[*She collects a milk bottle from the kitchen and puts it outside the front door.*]

PERCY : I'm not so pure as all that. I'm average.

CYRENNE : Stretching it a bit at thirty-five, don't you think?

PERCY (*strongly*) : No I don't. The people you meet aren't a true cross-section; not representative. I believe there's many folks like me who haven't the facets . . . yes, the facets. They haven't the facets to make friends easily. That doesn't mean they're warped or retarded, you know. There's nothing wrong with them. If anything . . .

CYRENNE : Yes, I know! It's all my fault.

PERCY : Well, I don't go around doing peculiar things, you know; or writing on walls. (*He starts to laugh.*)

CYRENNE : Now what?

PERCY : Oh, it's um . . . it's nothing.

CYRENNE : Percy, only nut-cases laugh at nothing; and it's terribly bad-mannered.

PERCY : I was um . . . I was thinking about the mill canteen; and on one of the doors in the . . . well, in the Gentlemen's Room, d'you see . . . someone has written "A Happy New Year To All Our Readers"! (*He goes into ecstasies of merriment.*) I think that's very funny, don't you?

CYRENNE (*dryly*) : You must remember to tell Ginger.

PERCY : Yes. (*Laughs again.*) No. It was Ginger told me . . . Oh, I'm sorry. It was rude.

[*Cyrenne smiles and kneels by his side.*]

CYRENNE : You're very sweet, Percival; quite normal; and quite, quite untouchable.

ACT TWO

[*Suddenly, as though unable to keep her hands away from him, she scrubs at his chest . . . and makes a loud comic growling sound. Then she rises and moves away . . . stretching luxuriously.*]

Oogh! Now I wish I'd gone to the yacht party. All at once I'm in the mood for wine, men and song.

PERCY: Oh, I'm batting at zero; and boring you into the bargain.

CYRENNE: Don't worry, my pet. Some woman'll materialize and your stuttering lips'll blossom into poetry . . . where are those blasted tissues? She'll listen enraptured to your Lancashire sweet nothings. She'll come; and she won't laugh.

PERCY: She's taking a heck of a long time.

CYRENNE: At thirty-five! No no! Beautiful age; everyone says so; beautiful! (*She goes into the kitchen.*) Oh, she'll come from somewhere, sometime; maybe tomorrow; and you'll be in clover. (*She laughs.*) I haven't thought as you do since I was twelve. I painted a picture of a naked boy when I was twelve. (*She comes back into the room.*)

PERCY: I daresay we all . . .

CYRENNE (*crossing to the tallboy*): . . . From a model, love. I made him strip off and stand by an old water butt in the yard. He was . . . he lived in the same street. (*She laughs and opens a tallboy drawer, taking out the missing tissues.*) Anyway, it rained and he caught a chill; then I took the painting to school and caused a scandal . . . a riot in fact! You should have seen the teachers! Oh, it was delicious! They sent me home, called my parents; reporters came; big splash in the local rag; altogether it was a bloody good do.

PERCY: Did you say "parents"?

CYRENNE: S-stepmother. Father married again.

RATTLE OF A SIMPLE MAN

PERCY : You said you painted him by a water butt in a yard. A boy from the same street.

CYRENNE : That's right.

PERCY : I thought you lived in a big house.

CYRENNE (*hesitates*) : I was staying with an aunt. She wasn't so well off.

PERCY : I see.

CYRENNE : So, that was when I was twelve. By the time I reached sixteen I was really whooping it up.

PERCY : You must have had quite a life.

CYRENNE : Yes, sirree! (*To behind his chair.*) Just fancy though! Sweet thirty-five and still full of excitement and naughty thoughts. Never mind, my pet. You're on top. (*sadly and full of yearning*) I can't even remember a first dance or a first kiss. Think I've been kissing and dancing since . . . God knows . . . since Adam.

PERCY : You're not so tremendously old.

CYRENNE : My story is twenty-four, Mr. Winthram. A hundred and twenty-four, to you. I know. My old paint box is still handy. Shall I paint you . . . in the raw?

PERCY : Oh. (*He laughs.*) There's no one I could show it to.

CYRENNE : I don't mean a picture. I mean paint you . . . all over.

[*Now she tickles him energetically. Percy goes into fits of anguished laughter.*]

We'd use blue because you'd be cold and shocked; green for your past; and orange dabs for the blushes yet to come.

[*Again she tickles him. Percy rocks with laughter and begs her to cease.*]

ACT TWO

PERCY : Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear ! (*Then suddenly serious*) Are you taking the mickey ?

CYRENNE (*shaking her head, she runs a finger along his neck and round his ear*) : No. I'm envying your carbolic-scrubbed life. D'you have scout mistresses ?

PERCY : In a way. We call them Guide Leaders.

CYRENNE : Lean your head over.

PERCY : Mm ?

CYRENNE : Against me.

[*She sits on the arm of his chair, draws his head to her breast, and soothes his brow with her hand.*]

You're not missing much, love. Haven't you heard them say love is an over-rated pastime ? But . . . but if you really . . .

[*She pauses; then pushes him gently away and goes over to the bed.*]

No, I mustn't steal. (*She sits on the end of the bed and reaches for her diary.*) It must have taken guts for you to come here tonight.

PERCY : Frankly, I don't remember much; so I can't claim guts. Besides I'm glad. I'm . . . I'm damn glad, and I'd like you to know that.

CYRENNE : Yes, you've told me. I'm honoured.

PERCY : I mean it.

CYRENNE : So do I. It's All Souls' Night. Everyone loves everyone; everyone wears wings. (*She opens her diary.*)

PERCY : Are you regretting missing the party ?

CYRENNE (*looks up*) : I'm pondering the alternative arrangements. You know, a performance indoors if it rains. (*She smiles.*) But even the roof is leaking.

PERCY : Let's . . . let's get down to brass tacks.

RATTLE OF A SIMPLE MAN

You're talking about making love to me, aren't you?

[She nods, and gently mimics his accent.]

CYRENNE : Brass tacks.

[On an impulse, Percy goes and sits beside her.]

PERCY : I'd like to, Cyrenne. I-I'd like to. I'd like to kiss you . . . and hold you, and say things. Cyrenne, I want . . .

[He makes a grab for her hand, and, in doing so, knocks her diary to the floor. He looks at the fallen book, then turns away.]

Oh blast !

CYRENNE (*picks it up*) : Doesn't matter. I'm always kicking it around.

[But the moment has gone. Percy intertwines his fingers and examines them.]

PERCY : Well, that's me : clumsy to the end ! Bang on form !

CYRENNE : Never mind. (*coaxing*) Percy ? . . . Percival ?

PERCY : I don't. I'm used to it.

CYRENNE : Where else did you go tonight ? . . . Mm ? . . . Come on, love. Snap out of the gloom !

PERCY : Last thing I remember's Piccadilly Circus : dancing in a ring round Eros. Then a policeman moved us on. Oh, yes ! . . . We went to a club next. Wait a minute ! (*Racks his brains.*) Yes ! Phew ! Cigarettes ten bob ! Ten bob for cigarettes ! And

ACT TWO

Ginger! (*He laughs.*) He was singing with the band. Next thing I remember's being thrown out. Then we went to your club and met you . . . Hang on, though! Wait a minute! (*He rises, eyes wide.*) Oh, Jemima! Now I've got it! . . . We had a bet.

CYRENNE : You and Ginger?

PERCY : Yes. He bet me I wouldn't dare . . .

CYRENNE : . . . Go home with me?

PERCY : Yes.

CYRENNE : How much?

PERCY : I've a dreadful feeling it was—(*gulps*)—fifty pounds.

CYRENNE : Including expenses?

PERCY (*tragically*) : Streuth! I must've been bonkers.

CYRENNE : You should be pleased. I am. I didn't know I was worth so much.

PERCY : Don't joke about it, please!

CYRENNE : You've won, haven't you? You're here!

PERCY : No, I haven't won. That's the whole point. It wasn't merely a question of coming home. I was supposed to . . . anyway I haven't won.

CYRENNE : O-oh! Well now! (*She writes in her diary.*)

PERCY : Cyrenne, seeing that . . .

CYRENNE : It'll all be forgotten by tomorrow.

PERCY : It won't, you know! Borrow threepence from Ginger and he's waiting with his hand out next day. Very strong principles, has Ginger.

CYRENNE : So you'll have to tell a fib after all.

PERCY : I couldn't now. No point in making a bet if you don't stick to the bargain. Oh, this is horrible. (*He paces in silence.*) . . . This is horrible.

CYRENNE (*angrily*) : Look, if you find me so damned horrible, go lick your wounds somewhere else?

PERCY : I'm sorry : I didn't intend any . . .

RATTLE OF A SIMPLE MAN

CYRENNE : . . . Just 'phone a cab, Percy. It's late; I'm tired; and you're worried.

PERCY (*hotly*) : Oh, it's always me! (*He strides to the telephone.*)

CYRENNE (*quietly*) : There's a taxi number scribbled on the table top.

[*Percy dials a number; Cyrenne reads aloud from her diary.*]

"Saturday. Eleven fifteen. Met Percy Winthram. Exclamation mark! Talked of life and disappointments. Felt someone looking over my shoulder for the first time in years. Exclamation mark!"

PERCY : Cyrenne . . .

CYRENNE : Sssh! . . . No.

PERCY : Oh, heck.

CYRENNE : "I wonder what will become of him; and if he'll think of me? Cue for song." (*She throws the diary behind her on to the bed.*) Any luck?

PERCY : It's ringing.

CYRENNE : They'll answer. Let yourself out, love. And next time you date a girl, try forcing your luck.

[*Cyrenne goes out left.*]

Percy hangs up. He dials a fresh number, after consulting a card taken from his pocket.

PERCY (*into the receiver*) : Hullo? Is that the Pablo Private Hotel, please?

VOICE : Pablo. Yes, that's right.

PERCY : Oh. This is Mr. Winthram. Has Mr. Grapple returned yet, please?

VOICE : Grapple? Dunno. I'll find out.

PERCY : Thank you. (*to himself*) I'm fighting time

ACT TWO

now; and I'm too damn scared to wind the clock . . . Oh, what if he's not back? What if he's plastered down some alley?

GINGER'S VOICE : Hullo?

PERCY : Hullo, Ginge ! It's Perce.

GINGER : Who?

PERCY (*fiercely whispering*) : *Perce.*

GINGER : Hullo, love ! How'd you get on?

PERCY : Fine. I got on fine.

GINGER : Did you do it? I mean . . . did you?

PERCY : I er, came *home* with her, yes.

GINGER : I know but . . . what's happened?

PERCY : Well, I'm at home with her.

GINGER : Still there !

PERCY : Yes.

GINGER : Bluddy-ell ! What've you been doing?

PERCY : Talking.

GINGER : Is that *all*?

PERCY : It's all so far, yes.

GINGER : Ha ha ! Get your wallet !

PERCY : No, listen, Ginge . . .

GINGER : . . . Fifty smackeroos ! Ha ha, ho, ho, ho !

PERCY : Ginge, listen : don't you think it's a bit stupid, all this?

GINGER : Hey ! We shook hands on this.

PERCY : I know we shook hands.

GINGER : No backing out, mind !

PERCY : I'm not backing out. Frankly, I'm giving *you* the chance. I mean, I'm here. I'm *here*, Ginge. Just a matter of time, that's all . . . Hullo?

GINGER : I'm here.

PERCY : D'you still want to go through with it, then?

GINGER : You've lost ! You're done ! You're dead scared ! Ha ha ! (*He rings off.*)

PERCY : Who's dead scared? Ha ! . . . Hullo? . . .

RATTLE OF A SIMPLE MAN

Hullo? . . . Ginger? . . . (*He hangs up gloomily.*)
Fool! Stupid fool! Throwing his money away!
Fifty pounds on a damn stupid bet.

[*Cyrenne enters. She has changed into a stylish electric-blue cocktail dress, and she seems altogether more acceptable and pacific.*]

CYRENNE : Still here?

PERCY : The taxi number didn't answer.

CYRENNE : Make yourself useful, then. Zip me up, there's a sweet.

PERCY : Where're you going?

CYRENNE : Going back to the club.

PERCY (*struggling with the zip*) : Phew! It's an awkward zip.

CYRENNE : Only going up . . . Well done!

[*Cyrenne moves to her tallboy; and we see that her dress is ninety per cent backless . . . with a tiny ten per cent zip. She opens her jewellery box and extracts a bracelet.*]

PERCY : I rang up Ginger.

CYRENNE : Did you?

PERCY : Yes. Oh, I owe you fourpence.

[*Moving to the bedside table, he gets out four pennies and places them down. Cyrenne holds out her arm across the bed.*]

CYRENNE : More help, please.

PERCY (*puts on the bracelet*) : Don't you want to hear what he said?

CYRENNE : If you like.

PERCY : He wouldn't give up the bet.

ACT TWO

CYRENNE : You know Ginger ! Thank you.

PERCY : Shall you be seeing anyone special?

CYRENNE : Probably.

PERCY : You look nice.

CYRENNE : Do I?

PERCY : Oh, what's the matter? Everything's gone . . . I don't know. Is it because I said "horrible"?

CYRENNE : No, that's forgotten.

PERCY : If you're cheesed because I messed up your evening . . . I'm sorry. Honestly. I'm so clumsy, so flipping clumsy.

CYRENNE : No, you're not.

PERCY : Then why have you gone so cold?

[She takes his hand, smiles at him sadly. Then the moment passes.]

CYRENNE : But we don't *really* mix, now do we ! Not really. So you're going to Euston and I'm going to see where they buried Saint Pancras. *(She pats his hand and releases it.)*

PERCY : Cy-Cyrenne, I had butterflies all yesterday thinking of the trip down here. I kept remembering : "It's a holiday tomorrow. A holiday !" So why shouldn't I make it one? If . . . if you'll be as you were before. If you'll be warm : you know . . . warm . . . I think this time I could . . .

[The doorbell rings. They both turn. Percy slaps his fist in plaintive frustration.]

PERCY : Oh, why did it have to ring now ! *(urgently)* I mustn't . . . I can't miss my chance. If you'd only be friendly again . . .

[The doorbell rings.]

RATTLE OF A SIMPLE MAN

CYRENNE : Well, once you get in the fresh air . . .

[*Again the doorbell. She hands the key to Percy.*]

Open up, love, before they break in. (*She goes out left.*)

PERCY : Ee, I wish I were different.

[*He unlocks and opens the door; then moves into the corridor. He opens the front door.*]

Ricard enters . . . a handsome Latin type in his late twenties. Perhaps there is a trace of weakness in his face. He is changeable—excitable—very much like Cyrenne, in fact.

He ignores Percy and moves into the room. He crosses immediately to the kitchen, taking in his surroundings en route.

PERCY : I'm er, pleased to meet you.

[*Ricard peers into the kitchen; then calls:*]

RICARD : Cinny ! Cinny !

CYRENNE (*hurrying in*) : Ricky ! Ricky love ! (*She runs to him.*) What a surprise.

RICARD (*to Percy*) : Would you mind ? This is personal.

PERCY : Oh, er . . .

RICARD : These yours ? (*Without waiting for an answer, he takes Percy's clothes from the banisters and throws them across at him.*)

PERCY : Hey ! Just a moment . . .

CYRENNE : . . . Friend of the family, Percy. Excuse his bad manners.

ACT TWO

PERCY : Is this how it ends, then?

CYRENNE (*indifferently*) : 'Fraid so, sweetie. Good luck with Ginger.

PERCY : . . . Night-night. (*to Ricard*) Night-night . . .

[*He makes a lonely exit. Cyrenne turns to face Ricard.*]

CYRENNE : Any time you're passing, just pop in and kick out my friends.

RICARD : Friend, was he !

CYRENNE : That's right . . . friend. You know, this is fantastic. You stroll in after all this time . . . don't even toot your horn : just stroll in. How've you been, Ricky?

RICARD : Fine. You?

CYRENNE (*merrily*) : Things have happened; time's gone

RICARD (*interrupts impatiently*) : I've come from Momma and Dad, Sis : said I'd take you back to-night.

CYRENNE : Oh?

RICARD : They want to see you. They're opening a new restaurant. We're all going in . . . whole family. Me, Margo; and we need you as well.

CYRENNE : I've given up slaving in cafés, Ricky. No thanks.

RICARD (*in the same dull, stubborn tone*) : You can be manager; then we shan't have to go outside the family.

CYRENNE : Dad can manage it. You don't need me.

RICARD : I just promised you'd go back and talk to them.

CYRENNE : Ah ! We're not talking very much these days, the family and me.

RICARD : Dad was very eager to have you . . .

RATTLE OF A SIMPLE MAN

CYRENNE (*strongly*) : He's not my father.

RICARD : All right, stepfather then. Where's your coat? I'm taking you back, Sis.

CYRENNE : Just like that! Marvellous!

RICARD : You need only stop an hour; then I've done my bit. (*unhooking her coat*) This the one?

CYRENNE : Are they all there? . . . Auntie Bo, Uncle Arturo, everyone?

RICARD : Aunt Bo's baby-sitting for Margo and me.

CYRENNE : Spaghetti's out, Ricky—got that? And I'm not attending any Cookhouse Conventions at this hour.

RICARD : No? What *were* your plans for tonight, Sis?

CYRENNE (*looks at him for a second then turns away.*) I spent my childhood in our old café and the very mention of cooking and cafés makes me ill.

RICARD : Well, anyway . . . tell *them*.

CYRENNE : No. I said no!

RICARD : Come on!

[*He pulls her arm with the intention of helping her into her coat, but she pushes him away. A struggle develops between them, half brother-sister fight and half serious. It ends violently. They fall across the bed and Cyrenne strikes at his face and frees herself; then she rises and backs away, panting.*]

RICARD : You little bitch!

CYRENNE : So I'm not going anywhere tonight . . . not anywhere.

RICARD (*rising*) : Not even on the prowl, Sis? On the beat?

[*She swings round, shocked.*]

ACT TWO

I *know*, Sis. I've seen you. Hadn't been off the ship a day! First person I met was old Tosky and he said, "I've seen your sister picking up men in a drinking club." I thanked him with a belt in the jaw. I was insulted. (*Laughs shortly.*) . . . So to prove he was lying, I watched outside that club of yours. I've watched for the last few days.

CYRENNE : That's a decent brotherly gesture.

RICARD : Were *you* decent, bringing men home? Two men, one after another! I was sick, physically sick. (*cruelly*) Been out tonight, have you?

CYRENNE (*almost hisses*) : Yes.

RICARD (*shouts*) : Fine! Good! I'm glad! . . . Holy Mother, why d'you do it? Why did you start?

CYRENNE : It's like I said : things've happened.

RICARD : My own sister . . . a prostitute.

[*Cyrenne turns on him. Her voice is low, fierce, quivering with emotion.*]

CYRENNE : Now listen, Ricky : you come into my house . . . this *is* my house . . . and you don't even ask how I am. You b-be good to me, Ricky.

RICARD : Oh yes, I've every reason, of course.

CYRENNE : Well, you're not so clever! You go abroad for months on end leaving a wife and two kids.

RICARD : I went on a job; and I've made money . . . good, *clean* money.

CYRENNE (*shouts*) : Don't say "clean" to me! You don't know, Ricky. You don't *know*. But since you're so damned sanctimonious, I'll tell you. Yes, why not! It was *him*, Ricky. He barged into my room and . . . and I was dressing.

RICARD : Who barged in?

RATTLE OF A SIMPLE MAN

CYRENNE : Momma took his side, as usual, but I'd done nothing . . .

RICARD : Who barged in?

CYRENNE : Dad. He was always like that with me. In the old café . . . that tiny kitchen . . . when he used to squeeze past me. And even upstairs.

RICARD : You're making it up. You're making it up to excuse yourself.

CYRENNE : No, Ricky : it was Poppa . . .

RICARD : Stop it, Sis! You're lying again.

CYRENNE : I never lied to you, Ricky. Honest! I never . . .

RICARD : Will you button up !

[He pushes her so that she falls across the end of the bed. Then he beats her across the back with a rolled newspaper. He strikes her five or six times, then throws down the paper and moves to the window.]

Aw, get up, Cinny. I didn't hurt you that much.

CYRENNE : No, you're not so tough. Don't blame you getting your own back. But try it once more and I'll tear your eyes out !

[She grabs the woolly dog from her dressing-table and hurls it across the room at her brother. He catches it. They face each other across the bed; and suddenly exchange a faint smile.]

RICARD : Well, there's no call to set your dog on me !

CYRENNE : His name is Chikita.

RICARD : It's a bitch-of-a-dog. Hiyah, Chikita ! (*He hurls it back at Cyrenne.*)

CYRENNE : Hey ! Don't hurt him.

ACT TWO

RICARD : Aw, Sis . .

[On a mutual impulse, they meet and embrace . . kneeling in the centre of the bed. Then they assume a casual conversational tone.]

CYRENNE : When did you get back?

RICARD : Last week? Been working at Poppa's café.

CYRENNE : This new restaurant your idea?

RICARD : Mm. I'm putting up the cash. S'going to be real snooty, Sis. Drinks, pianist, everything.

CYRENNE : Well, bully for you !

RICARD : They were all down there tonight, talking about it; saying how wonderful if Cinny came back. And Uncle Arturo . . . well, you know how excited he gets . . . said, "Let's pay a visit. Let's-a pay da visita pronto," he said. So I said *I'd* come. I saw them all arriving here and finding you—with someone, perhaps. It would have killed Momma.

CYRENNE (*tonelessly*) : Oh, yes. Yes it would.

RICARD : I haven't told them, you know; not even Margo.

CYRENNE : Good. Thank you.

RICARD : Cinny, come and stay at Momma's tonight, eh? Just for me . . . Well . . . Well, hell ! We were always fighting or crying together; always pretty damn close. Eh, Cinny?

CYRENNE : I can't. (*Shakes her head.*) I can't.

RICARD : I'm sorry about . . . about the way things are; sorry I walloped you.

CYRENNE : I wanted to marry you when I was young. I used to tell people : "I'm going to marry Ricky when I grow up."

RICARD : Remember when you almost hacked off my wrist making us blood brothers?

CYRENNE (*shrugs*) : I happened to catch a vein.

RATTLE OF A SIMPLE MAN

RICARD : Yeah. (*Examines his wrist.*)

CYRENNE : I thought it'd hurt less if I used a blunt edge. It was the thing for taking boy scouts out of horses' hooves.

RICARD : Remember when you painted that picture of me and took it to school?

CYRENNE : Oh . . . that. I got a hell of a lecture from Momma about brothers and sisters : what they were allowed to do and what they were not allowed to do.

RICARD : Momma?

CYRENNE (*nods*) : She was quite different with me after that. She never took her eyes off me. Momma had me in the old café every possible minute : washing up, scraping leavings into that filthy tea-chest in the yard . . . Do you remember the steam beetles on the oven wall?

RICARD : No.

CYRENNE : I do. Once I dropped my cloth behind the stove-pipe and when I pulled out my hand it was covered in steam beetles. (*She shudders.*) It was my punishment, you see, Ricky.

[*He starts an impatient denial but she interrupts, nodding gravely.*]

. . . You know what she thought, what everyone thought? Oh, yes. Momma made herself very clear—even at my age.

[*Ricard swings off the bed. He speaks strongly—almost violently; and one wonders if he is protesting to hide a conscience.*]

RICARD : So I undressed while my own sister painted my picture : so what ! I was only . . . I wasn't four-

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teen . . . I've led an ordinary, normal, healthy life. I've married; I have kids; Margo has no complaints. Anyway, it's past; forgotten. I don't know why I'm yapping.

CYRENNE : It started to rain and you wanted to go in; but I wouldn't let you. So you ran and tattled to Momma. You were always a tell-tale, Ricky. Used to like seeing me punished, didn't you, boy!

RICARD : Are you saying this is how it all started?

CYRENNE : Perhaps.

RICARD : Bringing me into it?

CYRENNE : "Perhaps" to that as well.

RICARD : Oh, great! Now it's *my* fault!

CYRENNE : I said "perhaps". (*angrily*) But it might help if you remembered it next time you call, instead of worrying about how you feel; how the family feels; how everyone feels—except *me*! Oh, what the hell! I know you mean well, love. (*Impulsively she kisses him.*) I know you mean well . . . Want a drink?

RICARD (*nods*) : Like I'm buried in sand.

CYRENNE : You bring the bottle; I'll fetch the glasses.

[*Cyrenne goes into the kitchen, and Ricard moves to the tallboy for the whisky.*]

CYRENNE : Oh, I've got some stamps for little Ricky and Perry.

RICARD : Oh, good, thanks.

CYRENNE : One of the g . . . a girl friend gave them me. I'd told her I had two nephews.

RICARD : Thanks.

CYRENNE : Margo at the café? (*She brings in the glasses and pours two tots.*)

RICARD : Yes. Lunch times . . . Thanks, that's plenty.

RATTLE OF A SIMPLE MAN

CYRENNE : Chow !

RICARD : Chow !

[They drink. Cyrenne puts down her glass and hunts through various pots and boxes on her dressing-table—in search of the foreign stamps. Then she pauses; and speaks over her shoulder to him.]

CYRENNE : Supposing . . . supposing I tried, Ricky? . . . no more lies and putting on airs; just plain, respectable me.

RICARD : Would you, Sis?

CYRENNE : Not spaghetti again : I couldn't try that saintly hard. Go in an office, maybe : nine till five and tennis afterwards. That make you happy?

RICARD : 'Course it would.

CYRENNE : All right then, it's a deal. *(She spits on her hand and holds it out.)* Moko Poko !

RICARD : Poko magee !

[He spits on his hand, they clap twice, then shake. It is obviously some secret childhood ritual.]

She holds his hand for a second, then quickly turns away and continues searching.]

CYRENNE : Where are those stamps? Tell you what ! I'll bring them round tomorrow.

RICARD : To my place?

CYRENNE : Yes. I haven't seen your kids in ages.

RICARD *(uneasily)* : It's a bit difficult tomorrow, Sis.

CYRENNE : Monday then. Where *are* they !

RICARD : Trouble is Margo isn't . . .

CYRENNE : There they are ! I'll make a huge parcel with these in the centre.

RICARD : Don't go to any bother. Shall I take them?

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CYRENNE : No, I want to see their faces.

RICARD : Only . . . you know Margo. She likes them in bed early and they're at school during the day.

CYRENNE : Any time suits me.

RICARD : It's only that um . . . the next few days . . . um, let's see now.

[He avoids looking in her direction and Cyrenne is getting the message. She turns slowly and looks at him, saying evenly and deliberately:]

CYRENNE : How about next Friday at six?

RICARD : . . . Margo's folks are coming, I think.

CYRENNE : Saturday?

RICARD : Well . . . I'll think about it, eh?

[Cyrenne holds a hand to her mouth, tightly closing her eyes.]

CYRENNE : What am I s-saying! (*She forces a laugh.*) I'm . . . I'm going away next week.

RICARD : You are?

CYRENNE : Switzerland. Winter sports. Yes. I've a boy-friend . . . Percival. He's just dying to take me on holiday. All above-board : no hanky-panky with Percy. He was here when you arrived.

RICARD : Well, this is wonderful, Sis. Marvellous.

CYRENNE : Yes. He's not a bad fellow; wants to marry me; always popping the question. He knows all about me.

RICARD : Well, what do you know! Cinny, why not? Eh? (*He claps his hands gaily.*) And I'll be best man.

CYRENNE : Mm.

RICARD (*heartily*) : You know, I've just thought :

RATTLE OF A SIMPLE MAN

Friday would've been fine. Margo's folks aren't coming until . . .

CYRENNE : . . . Don't push it, Ricky! (*in a whisper*) I got the message. (*She drains her glass.*) Buzz off now, love.

RICARD : This on the level, this holiday?

CYRENNE : Switzerland. Yes.

RICARD : Honest? I mean, all above-board and . . .

CYRENNE : I've had all I can take, Ricky.

RICARD : It's a fair question if you really mean to change.

[*Cyrenne feels humiliated. She speaks in a quiet, dead voice.*]

CYRENNE : I'll keep myself clean; wash my hands and nails. I'll send you a doctor's report.

RICARD : Aw, cut the music, Sis! I'm only asking for your word . . . your word of honour, that this Percy fella is . . .

CYRENNE (*rebels, shouts*) : No! It's a lie. He's a nasty sordid gentleman who calls every Saturday. And I'll be in next Saturday when he calls; and the next after that.

RICARD (*yells in return*) : And what about us? What when someone else says he's seen my sister? I can't break everybody's head.

CYRENNE : Try praying for me!

RICARD : It's a bit bloody late for that now.

[*Cyrenne pushes past him. He tries to catch her arm, but she shakes him away.*]

CYRENNE : Leave me alone, Ricky.

RICARD : All I'm asking is your word that . . .

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CYRENNE : Will you leave me alone ! Just leave me alone, will you ?

[*Cyrenne is mentally beaten: she gives in and sobs, resting against the wall, saying repeatedly, "Ricky, leave me alone"—over and over again until Ricard walks out.*

Cyrenne hears the door-slam and turns. On the table she sees Percy's rattle; she fondles it for a second or so, then drops it into the chair; then she moves to the bed, flops down, and hugs her toy dog.]

CYRENNE : I don't need them. I don't need anyone.

[*The telephone rings. Eagerly she clutches the receiver to her ear.*]

Yes ?

BILL'S VOICE : Cyrenna-mia ? It's Romeo, sweetheart.

CYRENNE : Willie darling !

BILL : Are you coming ? Last chance : we're just starting out.

CYRENNE : Starting out for where ?

BILL : For the yacht ! The yacht, sugar. Changed your mind yet ?

CYRENNE : No. I've been on the *Queen Mary*. (*urgently*) Come round here instead.

BILL : And miss free champagne ?

CYRENNE : *Please, Willie. Please.* Come and see me, Willie. *Please* come over.

BILL : Sorry, sweetie. It's me for the *Skylark*.

CYRENNE (*desperately*) : You'll be sea-sick.

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BILL : Come with me then; and we'll bring up the past together.

CYRENNE : Yes. (*dully*) Some other time.

[*She hangs up and wanders to her dressing-table. Suddenly the doorbell rings. She calls:*]

It's not locked.

[*As she sits and hurriedly repairs her make-up, the door opens and Percy appears.*]

PERCY : I forgot my rattle.

[*Cyrenne tries to laugh; but tears flow instead. She weeps silently.*]

It isn't half cold. I've been round the block six times. No, seven. A policeman followed me last time round. Can I come in and get it? My rattle?

[*Cyrenne nods. Percy chatters into the room.*]

Mm, 't isn't half cold. I saw two of the lads from our charabanc. Phew! Talk about sloshed. Their eyeballs were bottle-shaped. I bet that copper's nabbed 'em by now . . . Hey, what's the matter?

CYRENNE : Nerves, I think.

PERCY : Was it that chap?

CYRENNE (*shakes her head*) : It was my brother.

PERCY : Oh, your brother. Oh. Yes, now he's the doctor. Or is he the country club one?

CYRENNE : . . . He works in a café. It's my . . . it's a restaurant.

PERCY : We-ell, country club sounds better, doesn't it. We all put on airs; you know.

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CYRENNE : Not you; you don't.

PERCY : Everyone. Our Old Man at the mill can hardly talk for the plums in his mouth; but nobody minds; he's a good enough boss. He's never afraid to admit he came from Wigan. It's his missus, really. Hey, there's a tale going the rounds. Shall I tell you?

CYRENNE : Is it funny?

PERCY : It's a tale. You know: a joke. I'm quite good at jokes. It might cheer you up.

CYRENNE : Doubt it. Oh, sorry. Go on, try!

PERCY : Well . . . (*He clears his throat.*) . . . the managing director's wife called on the boss's wife, you see. Our boss's wife, I'm talking about. (*He shifts from foot to foot during this tale. He can't tell a tale to save his life.*) And the boss was in the garden; gardening. And he shouted out: "Ethel!" . . . His wife's called Ethel. I mean that's her name in real life. Anyway . . . Wait a minute! Let me get it straight. Um . . . yes. The boss called out "Ethel! Where's the manure for the roses?" . . . It's not near the knuckle.

CYRENNE : Who said that?

PERCY : No, the joke isn't. It's a bit cheeky but . . . oh, I'll think of another.

CYRENNE : No. I like this one. I'm fascinated.

PERCY : Oh. Well, he shouted "Ethel! Where's the manure for the roses?" and the managing director's wife said, "Oh, Ethel! Can't you make your husband say 'Fertilizer'? It's much more refined." And the boss's wife said . . . (*He giggles.*)

CYRENNE : Said what?

PERCY : "Make him say fertilizer! It's taken me ten years to make him say manure!"

[*He roars with laughter. Cyrenne ponders the joke*

unenlightened. Percy's laughter slowly fades as he notices her puzzlement.]

Don't you get it?

CYRENNE : I thought fertilizer and manure were the same thing.

PERCY : They are ! But don't you see . . . he'd always called . . . ! Oh, heck ! I'm really up against the dots now.

CYRENNE : Percy ! It's only a piece of wood on a ratchet.

PERCY : Beg pardon?

CYRENNE : This rattle.

PERCY : Yes, it was an excuse. D'you ever talk to yourself ? I do. If I'm not feeling particularly sleepy at night, I go long walks round the town. And I talk to myself. Sometimes, if I haven't finished the conversation when I get back home, I go round again !

[Cyrenne smiles.]

Oh, I do ! . . . Anyway, tonight—round and round that block, I was talking to you. And this is what I said : if it's y-your . . . d-desire to go with men ; I mean, you as a woman *do* go . . . (*blurts out*) You went cold with me. You lost interest. Surely I'm not so dull that even you . . . Oh, it's no use. It sounds wrong. (*urgently*) Cyrenne, can't you realize what tonight has been like for me ? I'm walking through Market Square, say, at three a.m. And suddenly there's a gigantic building slap-bang where the chip shop was : I mean, it shouldn't be there ! But it is. I open the door and there's a million people I've never met. They're all smiling and they

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seem to want me. Lights ablaze; music blaring. And then an exciting woman . . . (*he looks at her*) . . . a sweet, wonderful, exciting woman grabs my hand and hurtles me into the middle of it all. Three o'clock in the morning! And you thought there was nothing ahead but the eight o'clock buzzer . . . (*sadly*) Do you think I'm daft?

CYRENNE : Probably. (*She touches his hand.*) Are you still hungry?

PERCY : Have you found some more biscuits?

CYRENNE : I've some beans, sausage, corned beef, and more beans. Would you fancy those?

PERCY : Can a swim duck!

CYRENNE : There's still those damn dishes.

PERCY : The devil with them! You'll not see 'em for spray.

[He throws his raincoat on the bed and hurries into the kitchen. Cyrenne follows him in and fastens the apron round him.]

Percy turns on the taps and starts into the dishes with gusto.]

CYRENNE : Lot of money, fifty pounds.

PERCY : Ee, d'you have to rub it in! I'm still bleeding.

CYRENNE : A fellow could have himself a crazy holiday on fifty.

PERCY : I only spent thirty at Morecambe.

CYRENNE : Yes. Two crazy people could almost go.

[She places her finger-tips to her lips and backs out of the kitchen. She sits at her dressing-table, watching herself in the mirror.]

RATTLE OF A SIMPLE MAN

This girl in the building-that-never-was, would you take her on holiday?

PERCY : I'd need to be quick : due back at the mill on Monday.

CYRENNE : Why? Would the mill close without you?

PERCY : Ha ! That'll be the day.

CYRENNE : Mmmm . . .

PERCY : You may think me strange, but I enjoy washing up. I get quite a kick out of it. I like it. Most folks can't bear the sight of dirty dishes. Not me ! I love it. Must be the cosiest thing in the world to have a little kitchen all your own . . .

He prattles happily away.

Curtain

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It is half an hour later.

There is a tray of stacked dishes on the pouf, below the end of the bed.

Percy and Cyrenne are kneeling on the bed, facing one another . . . an orange balanced between their foreheads. Both are holding glasses and Cyrenne also has the whisky bottle. They are by no means drunk—not even “high”; but they are floating a little, say.

PERCY : . . . Idea is to travel it around our heads, turning as we go . . . People have rolled it miles . . . One who eats it, wins.

CYRENNE : To win this, you’d need a square head; and horizontal molars.

[The orange falls. They laugh.]

PERCY (*pointing to the tray*) : Hey, that was the best corned-beef-Bolognaise I’ve ever had. Didn’t realize I was so peckish. Were you peckish?

CYRENNE : Ah was that! . . . Liqueur, Monsewer? (*She pours whisky into his glass.*)

PERCY : Ta! I’m glad it turned out well : it’s the first corned-beef-Bolognaise I ever cooked. You don’t do much cooking, then?

CYRENNE : Not if I see it coming. (*Raises her glass.*) Skol!

PERCY : *Arrivederci!*

CYRENNE : May as well finish it. (*She empties the bottle into their glasses.*) Dead men tell no tales.

PERCY : Hey up! Steady on!

CYRENNE : Now, Percival! Don’t tell me you were boasting about all that liquor you drank.

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PERCY : No, I had plenty; but I'm a beer-man m'self. I once drank fourteen pints at a sitting.

CYRENNE : What happened?

PERCY : I passed out. (*He grins sheepishly.*) Oh, Cyrenne, I know what I was going to ask you . . . Oops! (*He slides from the bed to the floor.*) What college did you attend?

CYRENNE (*off guard*) : College?

PERCY : You said you got an M.A.

CYRENNE : Oxford.

PERCY : University, eh! Which one?

CYRENNE : One for girls, naturally.

PERCY : Magdalen?

CYRENNE (*sips her whisky*) : Mm.

PERCY : Did you get an M.A. for languages?

CYRENNE (*shrugs*) : Various courses. I only went for fun; never did any work. Young people should have fun.

PERCY : Within reason.

CYRENNE : I did. It was all singing, dancing, and parties on the river bank. Sometimes a whole gang of us'd take out a punt and float, just float, with bottles of wine and meat pies. (*She giggles.*) David . . . he was an earl's son . . . once got the pole stuck, and we floated on leaving him like a monkey up a stick in the middle of the water.

[*This is obviously something she has read in Girls' Own but Percy is tremendously impressed.*]

PERCY : Ay, must be marvellous at University.

CYRENNE : He was a nice healthy boy. (*wistfully*) No . . . complications. He gave me his fraternity pin. (*She is mixing up some American college film she has seen.*) He had freckles and close-cropped hair, and cuddly big sweaters with stripes round

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the arms and "Great Britain" on the front. During semester he played trombone with a jazz group.
PERCY : What's "semester"?

CYRENNE (*vaguely*) : Oh, you know. And when I was bored we'd race down the lanes in his car, me steering and him working the pedals and playing his trombone. He wanted to marry me; but I told him he was too young. Poor David! He sulked for weeks. (*Her voice trembles slightly with emotion. She empties her whisky glass in one gulp.*) Anyway, he wasn't supposed to go with girls. It ruined his baseball or something.

PERCY : Baseball? At Oxford?

CYRENNE (*smoothly*) : He was American. They have baseball teams for Americans at Oxford.

PERCY : Son of an earl?

CYRENNE : That . . . was David. I was talking about Philip.

PERCY : Oh. I must've lost track someplace. But how did you get an M.A. if you never did any work?

CYRENNE : Father bought it.

PERCY : Bought an M.A.! That doesn't seem right.

CYRENNE : You can do anything with money. Father was never short. Whenever he came to see me he always pushed a fiver in my hand. "Have fun, sweetie", he'd say.

PERCY : He sounds a very grand person. Shame he died so early : he might have . . . well, helped.

CYRENNE : Oh, never mind. (*She rubs her back with the whisky bottle.*) Aaagh . . . ni-ieeece!

PERCY (*ponderously*) : Cyrenne, do you think, perhaps, you had too much . . . too soon?

CYRENNE : And you did it without a couch!

PERCY : I can imagine what it's like to have been to University and all that; then strike a bit of bad

luck. So I thought . . . seeing your father isn't around . . . don't be insulted . . . but . . .

[He thrusts a five-pound note at her, self-consciously.]

Have fun, sweetie ! Ha ha !

CYRENNE : What's it for ?

PERCY : Nothing. No strings. Go ahead !

CYRENNE (*taking it, slowly*) : I'm afraid you've crept behind me, Percival.

PERCY : Oh, it's for my own sake as much as anyone. Makes me feel good. First time I've ever walked beside white pillars; first time I ever felt important. (*He turns away, looking in his wallet.*) Not that I agree with throwing money around . . . Ee heck ! I can't have spent all that ! . . . Phew ! Must've been those clubs.

CYRENNE : That's how it goes.

[She moves across to him and gives him back the money. Automatically he takes it; and he is just replacing it in his wallet, when he realizes:]

PERCY : Thanks . . . No ! Oh no ! What's gone is gone. That's yours.

CYRENNE : O.K.

[She takes it back and, crossing him, goes to hide the money in a pot on the dressing-table. She turns and tentatively offers it to him (with an instinctive jerk-back of her hand, before he could even have touched it).]

There's still time.

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PERCY : No, no. Just spend it wisely and . . . Aw! Spend it how you like. S'only once in a lifetime.

CYRENNE : All gone. You've had it! There's fifty-five gone for a burton.

PERCY : I shall put it all down to experience; shove it in the out-tray.

CYRENNE : Oh, you're not in the out-tray yet. In fact, you may yet still be outré. (*She hiccoughs and giggles.*) Pardon! I'm squiffy.

[*She moves to Percy and slaps his chest. He falls backwards on to the bed; as he does so, his feet come up. Cyrenne catches them, and we see two large holes in his shoes.*]

Doesn't mummy have your shoes mended?

PERCY : I've another pair at the digs, but brown didn't match my suit.

CYRENNE : Darling Percival, I shall dance at your wedding. From now on I'll sh . . . subscribe to the *Scunthorpe Bugle* or whatever's your local rag.

PERCY : . . . Scunthorpe's not in Manchester.

CYRENNE : All right, the *Manchester Bugle*. And as soon as your wedding is announced, I'll catch the first train down . . . up; I'll find your church; and when they're throwing confetti, with you on the porch all flushed and tumbled, I'll shout "Oy!" (*she whistles*) . . . "Remember me?" (*She opens her diary and writes:*) "Percy came back!" Exclamation mark!

PERCY : Bill Hedgers at the mill has a daughter sixteen and he's only thirty-six. Must be wonderful to own someone like her while you're still young : high heels, fluffy; someone you've made yourself. I envy him. Must be marvellous! Having her call-

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ing you "Dad" . . . asking your advice . . . must be marvellous!

CYRENNE (*writes*): "Am going to tuck him up and take him on holiday".

[*Percy has brought a pan and brush from the kitchen. Now he sweeps crumbs off the carpet.*]

PERCY: I often imagine myself with a daughter, but never a wife. S'funny! I see myself as a widower; my wife has died young. I never bother how; she's just dead. This is on me long walks round town. I see myself with this baby: bathing it, and feeding it, and tickling it, and changing its nappies . . . I've never told anyone else this. Next she's off to school . . . I've got on by this time: I'm successful, important, grey round the temples . . . and I collect her in the car. One of those whoppers, you know, all wheels and straps round the bonnet. Then she comes home with her first boy-friend . . . and I start worrying! I have to shake my head and think of something else.

CYRENNE: Have you a dog at home, or a cat?

PERCY: No, why?

CYRENNE: It's something to love. (*writes*) "Good Old Ginger!!" Double exclamation mark. (*She snaps the diary shut.*)

PERCY: What're you writing in there?

CYRENNE: The opening chapter of "Percy", my latest book.

PERCY: I think you're marvellous. Phew! Poems and painting . . . !

[*She picks up his jacket and helps him into it.*]

What about the washing-up?

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CYRENNE : It's Sunday. 'Gainst the law to wash up on a Sunday. I heard of one man who did and some of his dirty-minded friends never spoke to him again.

PERCY : Where're we going?

CYRENNE : You must learn to ignore the tea leaves till you need the pot again.

[She pushes him into the chair, left.]

You may've died by the next meal and you'd've wasted minutes of life round the dustbin.

[Kneeling, she pulls off one of his shoes.]

PERCY : What're you doing?

[She takes off his other shoe. There is an even larger hole in this. She rises, dropping them in his lap.]

CYRENNE : Once more round the block, dear friend, and you'd've been down to stocking feet . . . Now for slippers! I should have some. *(She exits left.)*

PERCY : Where've you gone?

CYRENNE *(off)* : Rummaging for slippers.

PERCY *(suspiciously)* : Men's slippers?

CYRENNE *(off)* : What else?

PERCY *(darkly)* : Whose are they?

CYRENNE *(re-entering)* : Mr. Green's the fruiterer's.

[She brings newspaper and scissors . . . and two paper bags. She puts one bag on each of his feet, then stands back to survey the result.]

Mm. Very sexy!

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[*Now she places a cushion on the floor by his chair and sits. During the ensuing dialogue she cuts paper and fits it into his shoes.*]

(*casually*) Been on holiday this year?

PERCY: Yes. I went to Morecambe. Went with Ginger and his wife 'n kids. They have friends over there, you know. But I stayed in digs.

CYRENNE: Otherwise all right?

PERCY: Yes, I had a marvellous time. Saw all the shows; did a bit of swimming; and I went horse-riding one day; first time I've done it. And there's some beautiful walks round there. One day I went . . .

CYRENNE: . . . By yourself?

PERCY: Pardon?

CYRENNE: By yourself?

PERCY: No, I went with people from the digs. There were a lot of married couples there. They took a fancy to me. I was always making them laugh. No, it was marvellous! . . . I think I'll go somewhere else next year, though.

CYRENNE: Good.

PERCY: What about you? Did you . . . I mean, do you . . . (*He stops.*)

CYRENNE: Yes, we're allowed holidays.

PERCY (*sorry*): Oh, heck.

CYRENNE: 'S'all right! Have you any more weeks coming?

PERCY: No, I've had my whack. Hey! Fancy you sitting there doing that.

CYRENNE: Just fancy.

PERCY: Being so domesticated. *You!*

CYRENNE: God help us, here we go again! Will you please stop treating me like some sort of freak.

PERCY: Well, I'm sorry; but it's not one-sided, you

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know! If you stopped treating me like a yokel with straw hair and a patch on me bottom . . . ! I shouldn't have said that. I'm sorry.

CYRENNE : Damn it, love, that's what I mean! If you feel like saying "bottom", say it! We've all got one.

PERCY : The fact remains I do not consider it necessary for a gentleman to be vulgar in the presence of a lady.

[Cyrenne laughs helplessly, but Percy remains on his dignity.]

If I accidentally make a blunt remark with a lady present, I apologize; I'll say no more.

CYRENNE : Next Sunday the Epistle of St. Percy!

[A silence follows, broken only by the snip-snip of Cyrenne's scissors.]

Percy, face set dogmatically, thinks over the past few sentences. Five seconds later a tiny smile twitches his lips. He kills it and has a quick look at Cyrenne. He thinks for another five seconds and the smile returns; he frowns hard in an effort to remain serious. This becomes impossible. He chokes back a chuckle; then another; and another. Cyrenne looks up, and he loses the battle.]

PERCY (*between chuckles*): You aren't half rude! . . . "We've all got one!" (*He roars with laughter.*)

CYRENNE (*calmly*): Oh, I slay 'em.

PERCY (*wipes his eyes*): Oh, dear, oh, dear, oh dear! (*Blows his nose.*) I've had some real good fun to-night. I have!

RATTLE OF A SIMPLE MAN

CYRENNE : There you are, killer! (*Gives him his shoes.*)

PERCY : Ta. Thanks very much.

[*Percy puts on his shoes and Cyrenne clears away her scissors and paper.*]

CYRENNE : You know, love, you remind me of a paper bag.

PERCY : 'S'funny thing to say.

CYRENNE : But you do. You remind me of a carrier bag; one of those old-fashioned ones with thick string-and-wood handles. Winthram's Drapery Store : brown and solid, until one day it carries a liberty bodice; and it crackles and giggles. Would you like to come on holiday?

PERCY : Oh, ay! When do we go? Today?

CYRENNE : Yes, or tomorrow.

[*He laughs.*]

Would you?

PERCY : With you?

CYRENNE : Mm.

PERCY : Nothing I'd like better.

CYRENNE : Will you come then?

PERCY : Seriously?

CYRENNE : Very seriously.

PERCY : I couldn't.

CYRENNE : The mill won't close without you.

PERCY : No, but . . .

CYRENNE : Afraid?

PERCY : Me? Why should I be?

CYRENNE : Because of what Mummy would say; and the boss; and the lady next door.

ACT THREE

PERCY : Did you mean for us to . . . to go together, sort of . . . together?

CYRENNE : You'd be my Sunday Boy, Percy. You'd have everything I've saved from the rest of the world. Just a week; no strings on my side. Then I'd wave you off at the coach station, and we'd both have something . . . well, something nice for . . .

PERCY : . . . For when the eight o'clock buzzer goes !

CYRENNE : Will you come?

PERCY : What about money? I'm not rich.

CYRENNE : Ginger's paying.

PERCY : Eh? . . . Oh yes!! (*He savours the idea.*) Oogh, what I wouldn't give! See that plum in Ginger's mouth : it'd shrivel to a currant!

[*He rises and moves centre, shaking his head.*]

It's a cheeky idea. It is truly; but I couldn't possibly. I mean, it's winter. I've had my two weeks this year.

CYRENNE : They weren't exactly a success though, were they?

PERCY : Who said so?

CYRENNE : You did, between the lines.

[*He begins to bluster; then gives in and nods.*]

PERCY : I must be pretty obvious. It wasn't too good. Never is. I don't enjoy Christmas much, either.

CYRENNE : Well?

PERCY : I'm trembling inside. Fact is, I don't have much confidence in myself, d'you follow? I've left it a bit late. I'm not thirty-five. I'm . . . I'm forty-two. Another six months I'll be forty-three . . . I don't think I could come up to your expectations.

I know I *can't*. I'm not going on holiday to be ridiculed the first time we . . . if you excuse me . . . go into the bedroom. I'm being blunt, but there it is. You've arrived too late. You know how youngsters when they're growing up have pimples? Well, I had pimples : my face was covered in them. They lasted until I was twenty-six and, unfortunately, I didn't have the right personality to rise above them. Then they suddenly cleared away . . . almost overnight. An Army doctor gave me a course of dieting. Very good man. So ! . . . I thought I'd be O.K. with girls at last. (*He shakes his head.*) Believe me, I might just as well've kept the pimples . . . At least I'd've had an excuse.

CYRENNE : Supposing I told you . . . some of the things I say . . . (*She bites her lip and stops.*) Oh, take a chance, Percy ! Why not ? . . . Percy ?

[*He swings to face her and the words tumble out.*]

PERCY : Because I'm afraid I'm not a man ; I'm afraid I'm effeminate or something. Everyone I know's been married, and had children, and . . . I'm scared of finding there's something different about me. Oh, I know I should grab a chance to prove myself but . . . I'm afraid to. I'm afraid.

CYRENNE : There's nothing different about you, love. I'm the expert.

PERCY : Oh, well, there's still the mill on Monday.

[*Cyrenne sits on the end of the bed, speaking more to herself than to him.*]

CYRENNE : I wanted to go on holiday. I'd have liked to go to Switzerland ; but anywhere would've done : Morecambe, Blackpool . . . Potter's Bar.

ACT THREE

[*Pause. Percy moves to her.*]

PERCY : Have you a railway guide?

CYRENNE : Yes? Somewhere.

PERCY : Go and fetch it. We'll try Blackpool. (*Sits beside her.*) I'll spend tonight at the hotel and bring my bag round first thing tomorrow. I've enough clothes for a week, if you don't mind rubbing through a couple of shirts for me.

[*She nods.*]

And would you not starch the collars, please? It cuts my neck.

CYRENNE : No starch.

PERCY : Oh, and a pair of socks, if you'd kindly rub through those, an' all.

CYRENNE : No starch!

[*Percy laughs. Then, summoning all his courage, he leans forward and pecks her cheek. Cyrenne responds by drawing his face to hers; she kisses him purposefully and very professionally.*]

CYRENNE : We'll buy some shirts. I need one or two things in any case. Now! Where's that timetable?

[*She exits left, leaving Percy to sit a long time . . . thinking, and relishing her kiss. Slowly he relaxes; his optimism grows, then blooms into exuberance. He jumps up; slaps his fists; rubs his hands. Laughs; cries; and at one point does a happy little shuffling dance . . . ending by swinging round in a circle.*]

This movement brings him face-to-face with the

bed! His confidence evaporates; and he turns slowly away, frowning and biting the side of his thumb. He walks to the dressing-table mirror and gazes at himself.]

PERCY : Oh, it'll be all right. Don't worry, Percy ! Just take it easy ! . . . I'll do it. I must. I will.

[The telephone rings. He answers it.]

Hullo?

PAPA'S VOICE : Bays-awater-seven-seven-nothing-seven?

PERCY (*checks the number*) : Yes?

PAPA : I am wishing-a speaka to Ricky. Yes? No, no? Tell-a Ricky, pliss. Papa is-a waiting.

PERCY : Um . . . I beg pardon, sir?

PAPA : Ah ! Is-a not Ricky. Ohkay ! Pliss to ring later. Yes? Am-a the old father. Papa Duponi-trades.

PERCY : Father?

PAPA : Si-si.

PERCY : *Whose* father?

PAPA : Cyrenna is-a my daughter. She's the good girl. Am speak from the café. Yes? Ohkay? Will ring later. Bye-bye. Ohkay? (*He rings off.*)

PERCY : Yes, righto.

[He replaces the receiver and slumps on the bed. He seems lost; dumbfounded.]

Cyrenne returns, an open railway guide in her hands.]

CYRENNE : This is so old it's printed in Latin. Who was it?

ACT THREE

[*Percy does not answer.*]

Darling, the 'phone ! Who was it ?

PERCY : It was your father back from the dead.

[*She stops in her tracks.*]

CYRENNE : You mean my stepfather.

PERCY : When did your real father die ?

CYRENNE : Long time ago . . .

PERCY : And your mother married again !

CYRENNE : Yes.

PERCY : You said your mother died when you were twelve.

[*He strides into the kitchen, takes her rent book off its hook, and reads out the name from the cover.*]

"Miss C. Duponitrades". Now it's making sense.

[*He throws the book down and returns into the room.*]

Since when has there been a Greek brigadier in the British Army ?

CYRENNE : Who said he was in the British Army ?

PERCY : The man said he was your father ; he talked with a foreign accent ; said he was ringing from the café. Yes ! Your father runs a café with your brother. Right ?

CYRENNE (*defiantly*) : Well done ! Full marks.

PERCY : A rent book for a house you own ; nannies and French marchionesses ; an M.A. your father bought ! Did you ever go to Oxford ? Come on, the truth ! Did you ?

CYRENNE : I slopped in a dismal little kitchen from leaving school till I was twenty.

PERCY : And I swallowed it wholesale ! Phew ! Intricate details of parties on the river, and . . . and a brother-in-law who's a surgeon ! And what about your mother ? Is she alive, too ?

CYRENNE : Yes, yes, yes, she's alive ! Satisfied ?

PERCY : That's something I'll never forgive. Your own flesh and blood—to say they were *dead* ! That's awful. Aren't they good enough ? Is that it ?—Just a little Italian couple, or Greek-or-whatever-it-is ?

CYRENNE : I tried to explain once. Oh, it doesn't matter.

PERCY : Oh no, it doesn't matter ! . . . It proves what a yob I am. Real gormless, that's me ! You poked fun at everything I did. I couldn't even visit the bathroom without getting a belly laugh . . . But you were so clever, that's what gets me. I shed tears over you and your poor old brigadier ; gave you five pounds to laugh at me ! I *trusted* you.

CYRENNE : It was your own idea.

PERCY : I know ; and I'll tell you another. You'll curl up at this. If the holiday had gone well I was thinking of marriage. You and me ! Isn't that funny !

CYRENNE : Oh, do me a favour, love ! I know better : the first morning you'd have crawled off with your tail between your legs.

PERCY : Would I really ?

CYRENNE : Yes, Percy.

PERCY : Would I ! Would I ! We'll see ! (*He flings the cover off the bed.*) I'm as good as you any time. I'm better !

[*She doesn't answer.*]

ACT THREE

What're you waiting for? More money? Get undressed!

[Cyrenne turns to look at him, then slowly rises and crosses to the dressing-table.]

CYRENNE (*quietly*): All right.

[Deliberately, she takes off her necklace and then her ear-rings . . .]

Percy lowers his eyes and swings away; there are tears in his voice.]

PERCY: Oh, shut up and leave me alone!

CYRENNE: You can't shame me . . . unfortunately.

PERCY: Everything's crumpled; just gone and crumpled . . . I had this feeling . . . wonderful . . . I thought you were so exciting . . . because I'm lonely. So damned lonely! Oh, what's the use! (*He takes his coat and scarf from the hooks and walks to the door.*) I'd best be going. But I can't tell you how I wish I'd never answered that telephone.

CYRENNE: Would you like a heavenly chorus?

PERCY: Pardon?

CYRENNE: You could do a Charlie Chaplin down the middle of Euston Road: shuffling over the brow, the traffic lights blinking mistily. What a bloody fuss! (*She kicks off her shoes and shuffles into her slippers.*)

PERCY: There's no call for swearing. It's not clever.

[But the fish-wife comes out in Cyrenne.]

CYRENNE: You come here in a stupor, find you've no guts, and you're ashamed . . . until I mention an

RATTLE OF A SIMPLE MAN

M.A., a butler, and the fact that I was sired by a brigadier.

PERCY : Yes : all lies.

CYRENNE : Listen, love : if I've told you the moon's green or God's a woman, I'm still the same person you appreciated ten minutes ago. So stuff that up your mill chimney ! (*Now she takes off her stockings, resting each foot in turn on the stool.*)

PERCY : Oh, no ! I'll not have that ! You're not the same to me.

CYRENNE : Because you're a snob, a one hundred per cent, cast iron, elastic-belted snob !

PERCY : Not at all !

CYRENNE : Yes, you are, with your "Ee by gums" and your "Up for the Cups" !

PERCY : Oh, sticks and stones !

CYRENNE : Your little British belly pumped with excitement at the thought of mixing with gentility : even to the extent of a gentle-whore like me. (*She tries to un-zip her dress.*)

PERCY : Just-just watch your language !

CYRENNE : As soon as I establish a true-blue background you're thrilled and oh-so-terribly impressed.

[*She exits but returns immediately, moving up to him.*]

You kiss my feet, cook my supper, and set up some kind of mission tent in my parlour . . . Un-zip the back !

PERCY : What're you doing ?

CYRENNE : Going to bed. What else ? You use my flat and my time to bolster what's left of a tatty week-end ; even go off and come back for more ! (*She moves to the door.*) Seven times round the block planning my redemption ! But not once ask-

ACT THREE

ing yourself if I care a pig's bottom what you plan.

[*Cyrenne goes into the bathroom, taking off her dress. Percy shouts after her:*]

PERCY : Oh lovely ! Lovely ! Lovely language for a young lady ! . . . Any planning that was done, *you* did. You planned me out of five quid *and* a holiday ; at the end of which, no doubt, you'd've planned me out of everything else . . . Premium Bonds, the lot ! . . . I count myself very lucky. Very lucky indeed. Are you listening ?

[*Cyrenne re-enters, buttoning up the jacket of her pyjamas . . . bright orange men's pyjamas.*]

CYRENNE : I don't give a galloping damn if you disappear in circles or hang yourself in your Lancashire cotton drawers. My life is my own ! (*Deliberately, she pulls off her right eye-lashes.*) . . . And I live as I please. (*She removes her left eye-lashes.*) Every two-bit hero thinks he has a right to re-organize me. Bloody marvellous ! (*She thickly covers her face in cleansing cream, then removes her make-up with tissues.*)

PERCY : I've asked you to watch your lang . . .

CYRENNE : . . . There's the door ! Nobody's keeping you. Go on ! Slam it and shout "Bum" through the keyhole !

PERCY : By heck ! (*He leans against the door.*)

CYRENNE : There's one comes round here. I'll tell you ! Once a week I hear him creeping down the steps ; I hear him breathing while he's prising up the letter-box flap . . . to shout through it ; to scream and slobber filthy words at me.

PERCY : Well, he's to be pitied.

[*The slanging match is over. They are both calm now.*]

CYRENNE : The lies I tell are useful to me. They're old friends, the people I invent. I laugh with them and cry with them . . . You think you are lonely? You've a mummy back home waiting to pack your rattle and fold your scarf all ready for next year. I bet she's baking a cake this very minute. And what about *your* father?

PERCY : He works at the mill.

CYRENNE : Old pals together ! On one of my birthdays I was admiring myself in the mirror; wasn't wearing much. My stepfather came in without knocking. After an unpatriotic incident I won't bother to shock you with, I left home. Are you with me so far, padre?

PERCY : Yes.

[*Sitting on the side of the bed, she kicks off her slippers.*]

CYRENNE : You sec, my stepfather, well, he wasn't a good stepdaddy . . . (*She clambers into bed.*) So, I started pretending I was someone else's daughter : usually a character in the book I was reading. I was always reading. I read "What Katy Did" and what she did next. Oh, I swallowed the lot, from Dickens to "Lady Chatterley" . . . at which point, padre, I gave up reading. I examined my assets from the front to the back to the side; and I said "Cyrenne ! You've struck oil !" . . .

[*She plumps her pillow.*]

Next comes a dismal romance lasting one year and

ACT THREE

two days; and ending with my fiancé in jail for slashing his wife . . . the wife he hadn't mentioned. He still writes to me, complaining about the food. Then I was a nurse; then a typist; shop assistant; hostess; and finally . . . well, as for the rest of my saga . . . I deserve a bloody M.A.!

[*She hurls a spare pillow at him.*]

So! . . . now and then I lunch with Lady This or That; spend twenty pounds an ounce on Woolworth's fragrant scent; or race down Oxford lanes with my dashing Virgin Boy. And when the going's rough, the Brigadier is there with lovely tales of Samarkand or Rumblejumblepore. No, I don't give a toot what anyone thinks. I have a goddam wonderful life. So Good-night Children Everywhere! (*She flops back and draws the sheet over her head.*)
PERCY: Phew! You don't half cuss! Bet you could beat Ginger if you really tried.

[*Cyrenne rises, without looking at him, and goes into the kitchen. She gets a glass of water and returns. She passes Percy with a sniff (demurely holding her pyjama jacket collar) and makes a wide circle around him . . . getting into bed at the far side.*]

CYRENNE: I thought you'd gone back to Scunthorpe.

PERCY: It's Manchester; you know perfectly well.

CYRENNE: Oh. (*Snuggles under the sheets.*)

PERCY: They suit you, those pyjamas. You look quite nice. (*He clears his throat.*) As I said before . . .

CYRENNE (*muffled*): And you'll say again!

RATTLE OF A SIMPLE MAN

PERCY : I beg your pardon?

[She sits bolt upright and looks at him with a heavy sigh.]

CYRENNE : Are you coming to bed or aren't you?

PERCY : Eh?

CYRENNE : You heard.

[He opens his mouth several times, then changes his mind. Finally he turns and looks at her; and she smiles slowly . . . a friendly, kindly smile. He grins sheepishly in return. Everything looks very promising . . . then suddenly he loses the mood and sits hopelessly on the edge of the bed.]

PERCY : Oh, I don't know. I'll have to think about it.

Curtain

THE
DOUBLE DECEIT
or
A CURE FOR JEALOUSY

a
Comedy
as it is acted

at the Theatre-Royal, in Covent-Garden

by
WILLIAM POPPLE, Esq.

The Birmingham Repertory Theatre (in association with the Arts Council of Great Britain) presented *The Double Deceit; or, A Cure For Jealousy* on October 30, 1962, with the following cast :

MEN

SIR WILLIAM COURTLOVE	<i>Ralph Nossek</i>
YOUNG COURTLOVE	<i>Derek Jacobi</i>
GAYLIFE	<i>William Ingram</i>
JERRY	<i>Arthur Pentelow</i>
FRANK	<i>Desmond Gill</i>
BELLAIR	<i>Paul Carson</i>
FOOTMEN	<i>Frank Ellis, Michael Brown</i>

WOMEN

HARRIET RICHLY	<i>Jennifer Hilary</i>
FANNY RICHLY	<i>Lesley Nunnerley</i>
ROSE	<i>Linda Morgan</i>
JENNY	<i>Sheila Gash</i>
MRS. PLYABLE	<i>Elsbeth Duxbury</i>
VIOLETTA	<i>Georgine Anderson</i>
LETTICE	<i>Linda Gardner</i>
WIDOW LETTWELL	<i>Eileen Beldon</i>

Directed by John Harrison

Designed by Finlay James

Music by Thomas Arne (1710-1778)

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

MEN

SIR WILLIAM COURTLOVE

YOUNG COURTLOVE, *his son*

GAYLIFE, *his nephew*

JERRY } *their men*
FRANK }

BELLAIR, *in love with Violetta*

WOMEN

HARRIET RICHLY } *young ladies of fortune*
FANNY RICHLY }

ROSE } *their maids*
JENNY }

MRS. PLYABLE, *governess to the young ladies*

VIOLETTA, *a young lady, disguised in men's clothes*

LETTICE, *her maid, disguised also*

WIDOW LETTWELL

Other Men and Maid Servants

SCENE

The scene is London. The time is from morning to evening.

PROLOGUE

By AARON HILL, Esq.

To cure Man's Jealousy, that Spleen too common,
Our Author chose me—a firm Friend to Woman.
A willing Doctor!—but the downright Fact is,
In this new Way, I'm but ill-turn'd for Practice,
Yet, hang it! in an Age unform'd for Daring,
What is there in the Breeches—but the Wearing?
My Outside's Man : and I've seen many a true one
Look full as little likely to undo one.

Mark, Ladies—and in this Night's Scene discover,
What Arts I'll teach you all, to hunt a Lover.

Wind him thro' Fear to Hope, from Rage to
Smiling;

Till he distrusts his Truth, by my Beguiling :—
Cruel,—with kind Intent, I first inflame him;

Then, when He's quite Horn-mad—look kind, and
tame him.

Gall him with Pain, to make him worthy Pleasure;
And teach him from his Trips, my Truth to

measure.

This done, I wed :—for then shou'd Love's
Ambition

Start some warm Cause, that might deserve
Suspicion,

Sense of past Blunders strikes his Recollection;
And Fear of New Ones shames him from—

Inspection.

Oh! 'tis a glorious Thing, when Authors write
Thus usefully—That we can profit by't!

They talk of Lessons drawn from Tragic Scenes,
Where love-sick Tyrants stab suspected Queens,
Where one imperious, ranting, fierce Othello
Roars Lordship into ev'ry tiny Fellow.

But give me Comedy—The World's true Picture!

PROLOGUE

There, when the jealous Doubter thinks he's nick'd
her,

Up starts the Sex's Wit, to aid our Nature!

And then—poor Spouse himself is prov'd the
Traitor.

Ah, Ladies!—if you dread the sidelong Eye,
The low-brow'd Squint, of joyless Jealousy;
If in the Pangs of Innocence, opprest,
You e'er have sigh'd, untrusted, and unblest;
Smile on this friendly Hand, that serves your Cause,
And crown his favour'd Scenes with kind Applause.

ACT ONE

Scene 1

Sir William's House.

Enter Sir William, Young Courtlove, and Gaylife.

SIR WILLIAM : Say no more, for I will have it so. Odsme, did not I marry before you?

YOUNG COURTLOVE : Yes, sir, and may a second time before me, if you think fit.

GAYLIFE : You see, sir, how reasonable your son is; he's not afraid of a mother-in-law, and a young brood of children.

SIR WILLIAM : What's that to you, sir?

GAYLIFE : Nay, good Sir William, don't be angry.

SIR WILLIAM : Not with you, sir—I have a shorter way to work with you. You know how your affairs stand. Not a souse of your estate, till you are five and twenty; unless you marry with my consent.

GAYLIFE : What, sir, has your care extended as far as me? Have you a wife for me too?

SIR WILLIAM : A wife for you too! Yes, sir, I have wives for you both, and such wives, that if you were not a couple of graceless rogues, that help to harden each other, you'd leap out of your skins to come at them. Young, handsome, witty, and thirty thousand pounds, you dogs, thirty thousand pounds apiece!

COURTLOVE : These, I own, sir, are softening circumstances; but then, marry so soon, sir!

SIR WILLIAM : So soon! What, you have not had your swing yet; you have not undone good families enough, by seducing their young, unexperienced daughters, who take all for gold that glitters?

COURTLOVE : You wrong us, sir; you can neither reproach my friend or me with such actions.

SIR WILLIAM : What, then you have confined your-

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

selves to a little harmless whoring, as you call it, contracting such a habit both of body and mind, that you're unfit for any other society. For, let me tell you, sirs, though the company of modest women finishes what education has begun, and completes the gentleman, the company of vicious, profligate, and abandoned women does as much harm to the mind, as to the body.

GAYLIFE : Have you ever found us in such company?

SIR WILLIAM : Oh, oh, then you're of the taste of those fine gentlemen, that prefer a round-ear-cap, a stuff gown, and a holland apron; that go about corrupting all the wenches in your neighbourhoods; that first inveigle them from their honest services, by your fair promises, and when you grow tired of 'em, turn 'em off with the fashionable salvo for the consciences of all such polite gentlemen.

GAYLIFE : I don't understand you. But, sir, will you be pleased to let us know who these ladies, our future spouses, are : perhaps, upon a better acquaintance, we may like 'em.

SIR WILLIAM : May like them ! My rogue shall like his; you may do as you list. You know what you are to expect if you refuse.

COURTLOVE : One word more, sir, if you please. You say the young ladies are equally handsome?

SIR WILLIAM : Equally handsome.

COURTLOVE : And witty?

SIR WILLIAM : And witty.

COURTLOVE : That they have thirty thousand pounds apiece?

SIR WILLIAM : Thirty thousand pounds apiece, left by an uncle; beside the father's estate at his death, which he will leave—

THE DOUBLE DECEIT

GAYLIFE : Equally between them.

SIR WILLIAM : Who told you so, sir?

GAYLIFE : I take it for granted, sir.

SIR WILLIAM : Why then you take it right, sir—equally between, Ned!—proceed.

COURTLOVE : Then, sir, the favour I have to ask, on behalf of Mr. Gaylife and myself, is, that you'll not fix on one, or t'other, for him or me, but let us see them, and choose for ourselves.

[*Enter Servant.*]

SERVANT : Sir, Mrs. Lettwell is below, and desires to see your Honour.

SIR WILLIAM : Odsme, I'm glad on't. That's the old lady, where they are to lodge. Sirrah, tell her I'll come this instant. Now, you rogues you, prepare yourselves for two such girls, so handsome, so witty!

GAYLIFE : You raise our expectations so high, that I long to know what sort of persons they have.

SIR WILLIAM : Persons! Nay, I don't know, for I never saw them!

GAYLIFE : Never saw them!

SIR WILLIAM : No, sir, never saw 'em. But what then, have they not thirty thousand pounds and can they want beauty or anything else? See 'em, quotha! Well, I'll step in, and speak to Mrs. Lettwell; and, in the meantime, d'you hear, prepare yourselves to go along with me to see 'em. Smug yourselves up, want for nothing to set you off; but observe me well. None of your fashionable undresses, that make a gentleman look worse than his own groom. Look like an Adonis, when you attack; steal into their hearts, boys, so-ftly, so-ftly—ah rogues! But, d'you hear, sirrah, d'you hear? Be

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

like a Mars, when you've once taken possession. You cannot be too rough for the softest Venus of 'em. Ah, ha!

[*Exit.*]

GAYLIFE: The old gentleman's joy is as troublesome as the occasion of it is disagreeable. But what did you mean by the proposal you made?

COURTLOVE: Why, I have a thought in my head, which may set all matters right, and prevent the match, if we should not like the choice he has made for us.

GAYLIFE: How's that? Bring that about, Ned, and thou shalt be my Apollo.

COURTLOVE: My father, tho' a little testy, and desirous of being made a grandfather, does not want for love for us both. When he returns, we'll pretend an entire submission to his will, and engage to marry the ladies whenever he pleases. This free consent will so work on his good nature, that he will refuse us nothing. We'll then tell him, that having a mind to try our mistresses' inclinations before marriage, in order to know how far love engages them to marry us, we have thought on a little harmless frolic to find it out, by making our men personate us, and court the ladies, whilst we will attend them, as if we were theirs. The old gentleman loves a frolic, when there is no harm in it, and the plausibility of the design will incline him to consent to the execution of it. Then if we should happen to dislike his taste, we'll make our men behave in so ridiculous and extravagant a manner, that the match shall break off on the womens' side by their refusal.

GAYLIFE: But if they should really like our men;

THE DOUBLE DECEIT

for the rogues have wit, and genteel figures; and you know the addition of fine clothes may take away the difference, that, to tell you a secret, is not so great between modern beaux and modern lackeys.

COURTLOVE : Nay, if they are capable of liking them, I'm sure they're not fit for us; and no father on earth should make me consent to marry them.

GAYLIFE : True, Ned, but then the old gentleman will always have it in his power to make the discovery before matters go so far as a rupture.

COURTLOVE : That consideration will make him the more easily come into the project. And if the women have any spirit, they'll never forgive the insult offered them, unless they like us, and then they'll forgive anything.

GAYLIFE : I like the scheme well. But still I doubt the old gentleman's consent.

COURTLOVE : Never fear that. Hold, here he comes.

[Enter Sir William.]

SIR WILLIAM : Where are these ungrateful rogues, that are so unconcerned at their approaching happiness? Odsme, when I was of your age, such a description as I have had of your mistresses, this moment, would have sent me to the top of the house, in the twinkling of an eye. What, will neither beauty nor fortune move you?

COURTLOVE : Your pardon, sir, we are both thoroughly sensible of your love for us; but it would be impossible, as well as unnatural, to feel the joy you'd have us, till we've not only seen the ladies, but are assured they take us out of inclination, and not as the absolute command of a parent.

SIR WILLIAM : Here's a ridiculous delicacy for you!

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

What matters whether they love you or no before marriage? If you deserve to be loved after, take my word for it, they'll give you enough.

COURTLOVE : Well, sir, to set all matters right, I've one proposition to make you; call it caprice, or whim, or what you please; indulge us but in it, and we'll marry the ladies whenever you will.

SIR WILLIAM : What is it, Ned?

COURTLOVE : Why thus, sir : the young ladies have never seen Mr. Gaylife nor myself : give us leave to disguise ourselves like our men, and make them personate us. By this means we shall not only discover the real inclinations of our mistresses, but likewise form some judgement of their sense and understanding, by the manner in which they will receive the addresses of our men.

SIR WILLIAM : Lookee, Ned, though I think it quite needless, as well as impertinent, to make such a trial, yet to show you how indulgent a parent I am, I will have this complaisance for you. But harkee, take heed : no plots to cheat the old gentleman; no tricks to put off the match. I was young myself once, and cheated my father, as you would me, if I did not watch you.

GAYLIFE : Harbour no such suspicions, sir; our view in this, is only to satisfy ourselves, and not to deceive you.

SIR WILLIAM : Well, I believe you.

GAYLIFE : I hope, sir, you've never found reason to think otherwise.

SIR WILLIAM : I never had an opportunity to believe one way or other yet. However, I shall watch you myself. But where are your men? Are they fit for your purpose?

GAYLIFE : Never fear them, sir; footmen, nowadays, know almost as much of polite life as their masters;

and I don't see they'll want any other kind of knowledge for this design. Will you see them yourself? Shall they come in, sir?

SIR WILLIAM : Yes, sir, I'll give 'em instructions myself.

COURTLOVE : And, in the meantime, Mr. Gaylife and I will dress ourselves, and wait upon the ladies with a sham message from ourselves, in order to have an opportunity of seeing them before we introduce our men.

SIR WILLIAM : Do so; and at your return wait for me here. But hold, I must give Mrs. Lettwell notice, lest she discover you. Well, send your men in and I'll do that afterwards.

[Exeunt Young Courtlove and Gaylife.]

There can be no trick in this; yet I'm always doubtful when young fellows make smooth proposals to their fathers. But I shall go step by step with them in it; and the Devil's in't if they can cheat me to my face. Oh, here are their fellows.

[Enter Jerry and Frank.]

Come hither, sirrah. D'you think, on occasion, you could personate the modern fine gentleman?

JERRY : 'Tis a character I don't much like; however, sir, to oblige you, I don't care if I do undertake it. The modern fine gentleman, you say. Let me see—that is, court every woman I see, without caring for any; despise every man that has more merit than myself; be profoundly ignorant, and ridicule those that are not so; be in ecstasies at an opera, though I've neither ear nor language; and at a play, where I have both, fall asleep, or run

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

from box to box, and talk to every creature I know, till I disturb the audience, and have drawn the eyes of everybody upon me.

SIR WILLIAM : Ha, ha ! Well, sir, and what then ?

JERRY : Why then, sir, I turn about with a disdainful air, laugh at them, and cry, damme, what do the fools stare at ? I am not at all out of countenance, sir ; not at all. Ha, ha.

SIR WILLIAM : And how come you by this complete knowledge of 'em ?

JERRY : Oh, sir, I have followed my master too long, not to be acquainted with—

SIR WILLIAM : Why, you rascal, is he such a character ?

JERRY : No, sir, but he herds with such ; and the proverb is very express.

SIR WILLIAM : A good arch fellow. And you, sir, what qualifications have you ?

FRANK : Sir, with your leave, we'll divide our sex between us. There are at present two reigning distinctions among the fine gentlemen of the age. There is the fop that dresses, and the fop that undresses : vanity lies at the bottom of both : the one thinks he can't adorn his outside enough, the other, that it wants no ornament : the one boasts of intrigues with women of fashion, whom he never sees but in public, and the other is as proud of being thought intimate with women of the town, whom he never sees in private.

SIR WILLIAM : Ha, ha, the rogue knows 'em.

JERRY : But pray, sir, when are we to assume this character, and to what purpose ?

SIR WILLIAM : Why to court a couple of fine ladies, in the names of my son and Mr. Gaylife ; I shall introduce you to them myself. 'Tis no hard task, you see.

FRANK : Nothing so easy. I have by heart all the cant necessary to please, and don't question, when I'm a little better clothed, to carry them at once.

SIR WILLIAM : Hold, that would be going beyond your commission. You are to calculate your behaviour so as to make 'em hate and despise you.

JERRY : If they've a grain of sense, they will, if we are to be such coxcombs.

SIR WILLIAM : But, pray, which of you gentlemen is to call me father?

JERRY : That honour, sir, shall be mine.

SIR WILLIAM : Then, sir, let me advise you to behave like a very dutiful son, lest I make use of a father's authority, and—

JERRY : Oh, sir, I shall take care.

FRANK : The only trouble I shall put you to, sir, will be to honour my bills as my guardian and trustee. I may draw for a cool hundred, or so.

SIR WILLIAM : Ay, ay, draw, sir, as much as you will; but d'you hear, bring the bills yourself, and I'll pay 'em at sight. But come, gentlemen, 'tis time for you to get in and dress yourselves, in order to be ready to wait upon your mistresses, when I send to you.

JERRY : O Lord, sir—that is impossible. Dress before dinner!

SIR WILLIAM : Why not before dinner?

JERRY : O dear sir, 'tis not the fashion, no man of taste dresses before dinner. If we are clean for an hour, or two, in the evening, 'tis enough. Hang the rest of the day, what is it worth?

SIR WILLIAM : Well, gentlemen, you are so much wiser than myself, that I shall not control you, but leave all that to your management. However, if you would for once break through your scruples, and dress yourselves before dinner—

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

JERRY : Lord, sir, how can we ! When you've sent our men away.

SIR WILLIAM : Ha, ha, the rogue does it admirably. Then wait upon yourselves, you're not the first gentleman that has waited upon himself before now. Go, get you in.

Exeunt.

Scene 2

An apartment in Mrs. Lettwell's house.

Enter Violetta and Lettice in men's clothes.

LETTICE : For Heaven's sake, dear madam, be so good as to be a little more communicative. I have followed you here to Town, equipped, as you see, without inquiring into any of your projects on the road, because I believe you had but a very imperfect notion of them yourself. But now we are well lodged here, and you seem a little easier in your mind, give me leave to inquire a little.

VIOLETTA : You shall know without it. In one word, Lettice, my present scheme is to regain Bellair, or lose myself.

LETTICE : One of which you will infallibly compass; for after this romantic expedition, I'm sure none but Bellair ought to venture on you. But pray, madam, what was the reason of your refusing him, since I humbly presume at present your inclinations bend the other way?

VIOLETTA : To tell you the truth, Lettice, his jealousies distracted me, and unless I could cure him of

that, I found it was impossible for me to be happy with him. That unfortunate rencounter of his, as I then thought it, in the garden with Miss Lovewell's gallant, which obliged him to fly to Holland, shall now be the happy means of uniting us, I hope, on my own terms for ever.

LETTICE : I wish, madam, it may. But I own I'm not clear-sighted enough to see what use you can make of that.

VIOLETTA : Why thus. Bellair is just returned from Holland, and is now in Town. I'll find him out, and get into his friendship. I'll pretend to be the person he met in the garden, and under a show of friendship, make a confidence to him of my intrigue with myself. In short, I'll tell him so many circumstances about him and myself, which it will be impossible for him to suppose I could know as a cavalier, without a very close intimacy with myself as Violetta, that he shall believe me as bad and as false as the worst of my sex.

LETTICE : Well, madam.

VIOLETTA : Lettice, thou'rt very dull. Dost thou not perceive the drift of this?

LETTICE : Not I, madam.

VIOLETTA : I did not think thee so stupid. After I have worked him up, so as to believe everything that's bad of me, I'll discover myself to him, reproach him for believing so ungenerously of me, from appearances only; and, by shewing how much a woman may be wronged by appearances, cure him at once of jealousy.

LETTICE : This, indeed, has an air of probability.

VIOLETTA : Ah, Lettice, I did not know, till this short absence, how much I loved him. But now—

LETTICE : True woman. You would ruin yourself to show it.

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

VIOLETTA : The risk, I own, is great. But no matter. You know my name, while here, is to be Careless. My father a rich old country gentleman, I'm going to Cambridge to finish my studies, and only stay a very short time here; that's enough for present use.

LETTICE : But hold. Your estate, where does that lie?

VIOLETTA : E'en where you will. As far off as possible.

LETTICE : Newcastle, or Berwick.

VIOLETTA : As well as anywhere.

LETTICE : Well then, madam, to show you mine was no impertinent curiosity, I'll tell you what I've discovered since I've been here. In the first place, that your cousins Richly came to Town last night, and lodge here.

VIOLETTA : Ha!

LETTICE : Secondly—who d'you think lodges in the very next apartment?

VIOLETTA : Nay, how should I know?

LETTICE : Mr. Bellair. I saw him myself.

VIOLETTA : Bellair! How my heart flutters! This is lucky. But how to work myself into his acquaintance without suspicion: oh for some natural introduction into his company. The rest would follow of itself.

LETTICE : A little patience, madam, and I'll find some.

[*Enter Widow.*]

WIDOW (*prinking herself*) : Your pardon, sir, for intruding thus upon you; but my duty obliges me to inquire if anything is wanting that I can supply you with.

VIOLETTA : Not to trouble you, madam, my servant, with your leave, shall ask what I want from yours.

THE DOUBLE DECEIT

WIDOW : 'Tis my duty to wait on my lodgers myself, and my inclination will accompany that duty, when it is employed for so complete a gentleman.

VIOLETTA : How shall I return this civility?

WIDOW : Please but to command me, you'll find me always ready.

LETTICE (*to Violetta*) : I'll be hanged if this old Winterpiece has not a mind to melt her snow in the spring of your embraces.

VIOLETTA : Gad, I don't know what to think of it.

WIDOW (*aside*) : I must try to engage him to me by civilities to him—(*to Violetta*) sir, as you are but just come to Town, and in some disorder, will you be so good as to accept of my small ordinary, till you are settled? There is but one gentleman, just come from Holland, dines with me. That's all the company. A fine gentleman he is, I assure you.

VIOLETTA : This must be Bellair. Madam, you're so obliging, it is impossible to resist you. I'll but give my servant some directions, and wait on you.

WIDOW : Your most obedient, devoted—A most incomparable youth, fit for the bosom of an empress—sir, your very humble servant. I must go pay my duty to my other lodgers.

[*Exit.*]

LETTICE : Our affairs go well. You'll have as good an opportunity of beginning an acquaintance—

VIOLETTA : As I could wish. Let me see—Lettrice, I'd have you go to the inn, reassume your own figure, and return hither dressed as my maid. Contrive to be seen by Bellair, as you come in. Ask for Mr. Careless. I'll hold him in talk till you get to my apartment, where I'll join you, and concert farther what is to be done. Fly.

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

LETTICE : I'm gone.

[*Exeunt.*

Enter Harriet and Fanny.]

HARRIET : How barbarous, my dear Fanny, is the custom of parents, to sacrifice every passion of their children to that alone, which they can feel, avarice !

FANNY : And how foolish those children, that can pay such implicit obedience ! Life, girl, is not to be thrown away ; its pleasures are not circumscribed by equipage, dress and show, bags or land. They grace, I confess, happiness, but do not make it.

HARRIET : For my part, I'm resolved to be a rebel, unless I like my man. Thanks to our good old uncle, who left us wherewithal to put in practice that generous way of thinking he took such early care to inculcate in us.

FANNY : And you shall find me as obstinate a rebel as you can be. 'Tis but waiting a year or two, and our own fortunes, sufficient, I'm sure, to make any man that has us live very comfortably, will fall into our own hands.

HARRIET : And that man that can't live a year or two on love and me—

FANNY : Shall never have you. Right, my dear, if we could insure our lives. But we are all mortal, and if we disoblige our father, and should die before we're of age, the man will have had no great catch.

HARRIET : No great catch ! Sister, you're too humble. If I was a man, I'm sure two years' possession of as tight a girl as yourself or me would carry its own reward along with it.

FANNY : Ay, but the misfortune is, you're no man.

THE DOUBLE DECEIT

Come, come, though you're younger, sister, take this piece of advice from me. The men find no beauty in a wife, that they have not had, perhaps, in a higher degree, in a mistress; and if they were to marry us for a complexion, a shape, or a face only, for something new, Lord have mercy on the poor wives!

HARRIET : And yet, sister, we see, notwithstanding the rich banquet they feed on, they one time or other quit that delicious food, and marry for love.

FANNY : They have art enough to make us believe so, and that is all one.

HARRIET : Well, I think better of 'em than you do.

FANNY : Nay, I've no quarrel against them; only I would not think better of them than I may reasonably expect to find them.

[*Enter Widow, with a paper.*]

WIDOW : Ladies, your servant : this paper must be my apology. (*She gives it to Harriet.*)

HARRIET : What's this, a letter from Sir William! (*Reads apart.*)

WIDOW : I shall gain their hearts by this discovery.

HARRIET : Dear madam, we are infinitely obliged to you. (*Laughs, and gives the paper to Fanny.*)

WIDOW : Not in the least, ladies. In serving you, I do but my duty. Besides, though Sir William is a very worthy gentleman, yet this is a party cause; a female interest.

HARRIET : Well, this discovery was fortunate.

FANNY : Fortunate indeed; for had it been made a moment later, it had been of no service.

HARRIET : If we are not even with them now, and do not match them at their own weapons, maid for man, let woman lose a proverb henceforward,

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

and wit no longer be the prerogative of our sex.
What say you, sister?

FANNY : Say, that I long to begin.

HARRIET : Dear madam, if you should perceive any alterations in our dresses, or those of our maids, increase our obligations to you by keeping our secret.

WIDOW : Ladies, you may dispose of me and mine as you please. Your very obedient.

[*Exit Widow.*]

FANNY : How impatient am I ! To see them affecting their men's behaviour, and courting us in the familiar style of footmen. Ha, ha !

HARRIET : And then our demure replies, and awkward bashfulnesses.

FANNY : But how to persuade our old governess into this wild project, without letting her into the real truth of our disguise ?

HARRIET : 'Tis a tender loving old soul, and can refuse us nothing. I'll take that task upon me.

FANNY : If they should fall in love with our maids, I could find in my heart not to undeceive 'em, but let 'em marry for mere spite.

HARRIET : But if they should fall in love with us in our servile attire, what then ?

FANNY : Why then, girl, I'd travel all the world over with them. But come, my dear, let us go in, and prepare all things for our design.

Too weak by nature, mankind to oppose,
By wit we triumph o'er our sex's foes.

Exeunt.

ACT TWO

Scene 1

Enter Bellair, as from dinner.

BELLAIR : A good agreeable young fellow, this Careless ! I'll cultivate his acquaintance. He has raised my curiosity, by some things he has let fall about Scarborough. Perhaps he was there, when I had my unfortunate affair, and may give me some knowledge of my rival. I'll turn the discourse that way—Oh, here he comes.

[Enter Violetta.]

VIOLETTA : What, d'you fly from your colours ? Afraid of the glass !

BELLAIR : No, faith. 'Twas not that. But the Widow look'd so sweet upon you, that I thought coming off a long journey, you might have been glad to have been left alone even with her ; therefore came away.

VIOLETTA : 'Twas kind, I confess. But I have other women in my thoughts.

BELLAIR : Other women ! What, an intrigue already ! You're the most expeditious man I know. You arrived but last night, and have not stirred out yet, and have already other women in your thoughts.

VIOLETTA : Now for a piece of false confidence to deceive him with. Your wonder will cease, when you know the intrigue I mean, began in the north.

BELLAIR : In the north ! That place is fruitful in love adventure.

VIOLETTA : Ay, sir, in the north it began. Where it will end, and how far I am to travel yet, I know not. York Races gave it birth, Scarborough con-

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

firmed its growing strength, though it had like to have cost me my life; for I fought a blind sort of a duel there, with a rival; London will, I hope, bring it to maturity.

BELLAIR : Ha, a duel ! Sure this is the man I fought. But I'll dissemble, and he'll betray himself—I presume the affair was honourable?

VIOLETTA : Now for a home touch. Faith, I don't know, there is a rival in the case. I rather choose to let him marry her, and—

BELLAIR : You consummate for him—Hell and the Devil ! (*aside*)

VIOLETTA : Does it pinch ! I think, indeed, 'twill end there.

BELLAIR : Her name, to be sure, need be no secret, since your designs tend that way.

VIOLETTA : Why, faith, 'twould not be like a gentleman to tell it. (*aside*) Yet you must know it.

BELLAIR : How high my expectation is wound up !

VIOLETTA : However, as I intend to make a friend of you—

BELLAIR : You choose well, I'll say that for you.

VIOLETTA : I'll trust you with her christian name; Violetta.

BELLAIR : Violetta ! 'Sdeath, is it possible ! Can I bear this?

VIOLETTA : It works rarely.

BELLAIR : But did you never learn with whom you fought?

VIOLETTA : I never inquired ! 'Twas not worth my while. I was the happy man; let the rejected lover inquire after his rival; I had softer business on my hands. But to tell you the real truth, it was a mock-fight.

BELLAIR : Patience, that I may hear him out—a mock-fight !

VIOLETTA : Shall I tell you the whole story? It was the prettiest plot! Well, for invention let women alone.

BELLAIR : Thou art a lucky man.

VIOLETTA : You shall hear. Violetta, importuned with the addresses of a gentleman she did not like; some formal, honourable coxcomb, I suppose—

BELLAIR : Very likely—damnation!

VIOLETTA : And not knowing how to get rid of him, that she might see me with the more freedom—you understand me—

BELLAIR : Mighty well. Pray go on.

VIOLETTA : Sends a letter to this gentleman, desiring to see her at night; for which purpose she'd leave the garden door open.

BELLAIR (*aside*) : The very letter I received!

VIOLETTA : I leave you to judge the effect it had on him.

BELLAIR : You need not tell me. I can easily guess.—confusion!

VIOLETTA : Poor fool! He thought at least he was to pass the night with her. No, no, she was better provided. He came punctually to the hour.

BELLAIR (*half aloud*) : That he did.

VIOLETTA : Hum! What do you say?

BELLAIR : Who I? Nothing.

VIOLETTA : I thought you had spoke.

BELLAIR : No, not I.

VIOLETTA : Well, pray mark me. Violetta and I had agreed beforehand, that I should wait in the garden for his coming, and jostle him at his entrance. The consequence of which was, he would immediately draw; at the very first pass he should make, I was to drop, and groan in so dying a tone, that he, thinking me dispatched, should be obliged to fly the place, and leave the coast clear for me.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

BELLAIR (*aside*): Damn'd jilt! Was ever man so impos'd on!

VIOLETTA: It goes as I could wish. His concern shews he still loves me.—Everything fell out as we expected. He thought me killed, took post on the instant to Hull, embarked there, and fled to Holland, where I believe he'll hardly make any long stay, if he is not already returned.

BELLAIR: Perhaps he is returned.

VIOLETTA: 'Tis no matter whether he is or no. But to see, in a surprise, how foolishly men behave! Had he stayed but one moment, he must have discovered all: for I am certain he was scarce out of the garden gate, before, not being able to contain myself, I burst out into such a fit of laughter at the trick put upon him, that if he had returned, he might have changed our comedy into something more serious.

BELLAIR (*aside*): Would to Heaven I had. But it is not too late for that yet.

VIOLETTA (*laughing*): Besides, if he had but looked at his sword, he would have been confoundedly puzzled to have discovered one drop of blood on it.

BELLAIR (*aside*): 'Twas well for you he dropped it.

VIOLETTA: But the best of all—the very thought makes me wanton—to see the charming Violetta, only covered by a loose night-gown, come and raise me from the ground, pressing me in her soft arms, and inquiring tenderly, if, indeed, I was not hurt! Oh, I shall never forget it.

BELLAIR: I shall never contain.

VIOLETTA: Why, how now, friend, you don't seem to taste the circumstances of the story.

BELLAIR: Pardon me, sir, I taste them very feelingly. But I can't rejoice at your good luck, without pitying, methinks, your unfortunate rival.

THE DOUBLE DECEIT

VIOLETTA : Hang him, never mind him. If he was such a fool, he deserved it.

BELLAIR : Faith, I think he did. (*aside*) What a pretty figure I make!—Well, sir, I don't suppose you passed the night in the garden. The air was too fresh for the looseness of her attire. You went to her chamber, to be sure; there her soft arms might press you closer; there you convinced her you were not hurt : ha, was it not so? Come, come; you're gone too far to stop here; you—

VIOLETTA (*aside*) : I must shut his mouth, or I shall hear too much. I'm quite frightened.

BELLAIR : Nay, you shall tell me. What, stop at the best of the story! You've raised my expectations, and must not disappoint me.

VIOLETTA : Nothing upon honour passed. I was bashful, and lost my opportunity. But I hope to make myself amends for it here.

BELLAIR : Nay, now I declare, I'm for your rival; I'm sure he would not have lost such an opportunity. But 'tis always so with you fluttering sparks; you buzz about a woman, and make a mighty stir; give the world to understand no woman can resist you, when, in private, you tremble lest they should not. Your mistress escaped then, I find. No thanks to herself though however.

VIOLETTA : Well, I confess my fault. I am but young, and unversed in such adventures.

BELLAIR : Ha, what do I see! (*looking out*) Violetta's maid going to his apartment!

VIOLETTA : 'Tis Lettice. She has timed it luckily.

[*Enter Maid.*]

MAID (*to Violetta*) : Sir, a gentlewoman within desires to speak with you.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

VIOLETTA : 'Tis her maid. (*to Bellair*) Dear friend, excuse me, if I leave you; when I am tired, you shall have her. I'll let you succeed me, as is the custom nowadays among the men of honour.

[*Exit Violetta.*

Enter Rose and Jenny, dressed like the ladies; Harriet and Fanny, like the maids.]

HARRIET : Well, Rose, how do you like yourself in this dress?

ROSE : So well, madam, that I shall not lay it down again, but with a very heavy heart.

HARRIET : Well, girls, take care how you behave, when your lovers come. Be as ungainly as you please; affect a rustic simplicity; blush when they make fine speeches; shew that you understand 'em, but shew it in an awkward way.

ROSE : We'll take care, madam. But without being impertinently forward, do you know how to behave in ours? For, let me tell you, madam, 'tis an easier task for us to imitate you, for women by nature are aspiring, than it is for you to descend to our low state. Besides, madam, there is one thing you don't foresee, which will puzzle you a little—

HARRIET : What's that, Rose?

ROSE : Why, madam, their men, if they've spirit or politeness, will, to be sure, make their addresses to you. Now, madam, servants, when they meet, don't stand at such awful distance, nor court with so much ceremony, as their masters and mistresses. Decency is, indeed, preserved, but then the livery-decency allows some little liberties, which you might think too free to admit of, and might discover you, if you should refuse and be, what we call, too scrupulously reserved.

THE DOUBLE DECEIT

HARRIET : Well, Rose, I thank you for your instructions; but since you do preserve decency in your addresses, we'll for once let ourselves down to your pitch, and carry ourselves, as you would.

FANNY (*aside*) : They look so well, I'm almost afraid our lovers should like them. What noise is that? Get you in.

[*Exeunt maids.*

Enter Widow.]

WIDOW : Ladies, here are your lovers disguised, who wait without for admittance. They have a message to deliver to you, or rather your maids.

HARRIET : Shew 'em in. How do they look?

WIDOW : As much like footmen as they can.

HARRIET : Well, shew 'em up. We'll receive the message.

[*Enter Young Courtlove and Gaylife, disguised like footmen.*]

COURTLOVE (*going up, stops*) : Ladies—your pardon, pretty maids, our message is to your ladies.

HARRIET : If you'll please to trust us with it, we'll deliver it to our mistresses.

GAYLIFE : Though unwilling to disoblige you, we cannot stretch our complaisance beyond our duty to our masters. Our commission goes directly to your ladies, and cannot be delivered but to them.

FANNY : Sure, it is a very particular one, since a lady's woman cannot be trusted with it.

COURTLOVE : It is, indeed, particular. But in the present circumstances of affairs, unavoidable; and the only proof of our masters' regard, that was left to them to give.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

HARRIET : If their men had followed their example, there was one complaisance left them to have shewn us, which would have enhanced their welcome from us.

COURTLOVE : What's that, my pretty accuser?

HARRIET : Why, to have trusted us, with what their masters thought fit to trust them with : a complaisance that might have been expected, from so polite an appearance.

COURTLOVE : Forgive us this omission, dear creatures, and you shall never have reason to complain.

FANNY : Well, for once be it so. Please to wait here, while we go and acquaint our ladies.

[Exeunt ladies.]

GAYLIFE : A couple of pretty wenches, Ned, and our perquisites. We'll not wear the livery for nothing.

COURTLOVE : If their mistresses resemble them, off it goes at once. I long to see what creatures they are.

[Re-enter Harriet and Fanny.]

HARRIET : Our ladies will come this minute.

COURTLOVE : In the meantime, give us leave to repair our fault, by assuring you the happiness reserved for our masters, in the sight of your ladies, must fall short of that we have already enjoyed. Your mistresses must lose, when you are by.

FANNY : To determine before you see, cannot be taken as a compliment by any, but one that has

more vanity than either of us ever desire to be thought to have.

GAYLIFE : So smart ! Suppose our ideas of beauty, can rise no higher than what we see in you ? How looks the compliment now ?

FANNY (*smiling*) : Why, I own it has a better look. But here come our mistresses, to undeceive you at once.

[*Enter Rose, Jenny, and Mrs. Plyable.*]

COURTLOVE (*aside*) : The Devil they do ! (*bows low*) Ladies, my young master, Mr. Courtlove, and Mr. Gaylife, my comrade's, (*Gaylife bows*) have ordered us to acquaint you from them, that since matters are so far advanced between your father and theirs, the only mark of respect they can shew you, is to let you know that neither of them would willingly force your inclinations, and desire therefore leave to wait upon you, in person, that after you have seen them, you would direct them where to pay their addresses, by declaring frankly which of them you, madam, and you, respectively, choose to be served by.

HARRIET (*to Fanny*) : What a gentleman-like proposal, and how prettily delivered !

COURTLOVE : They ordered us likewise to add, that they did not question, but that the merit and charms of each of you ladies, would be sufficient to engage the heart you should honour by your approbation.

GAYLIFE : Ladies, my comrade having spoke my master's sense of this, I will not trouble you with repeating my commission, which would be only spinning out a time they must already think tedious till they see you.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

[*All this time, Rose and Jenny appear confused, and talk in dumb show to each other, and to Mrs. Plyable.*]

COURTLOVE : 'sdeath, why don't they answer?

GAYLIFE : What hoydens!

ROSE (*to Jenny*) : Do you speak.

JENNY : No, do you.

PLYABLE : Why don't you say something? Speak one of you.

ROSE (*to Mrs. Plyable*) : What shall I say?—our kind services to your masters.

JENNY : And loves if you please.

PLYABLE : Hold, my dear, that's too much to send to gentlemen you never have seen. These rude wenches will spoil all.

JENNY : Why, don't we do so in the country? Besides, are not we going to be married to them?

PLYABLE : Peace, and let me speak for you. (*Goes up to Young Courtlove and Gaylife.*)

GAYLIFE : Hark, the answer's settled, and the old oracle delivers it.

PLYABLE : Gentlemen, my young ladies being used all their lives to the country, and of course a little unacquainted with Town manners, were at a loss, not what answer to return, but how to word it; which your masters will be so good therefore to excuse, if not quite so elegantly set forth, as their proposition was by you.

COURTLOVE : You make us blush.

PLYABLE : Be pleased then, gentlemen, to return the young ladies' thanks to your masters, and tell them, that as they don't doubt but they are both agreeable gentlemen, and men of honour, they will not disguise their inclinations, after they have had the pleasure to see them.

THE DOUBLE DECEIT

ROSE : Yes : and pray tell them to come soon, for we stay at home on purpose.

JENNY : And want company to make us laugh.

[*The maids go out. Young Courtlove and Gaylife go up to Harriet and Fanny and bow to them; the ladies curtsy.*]

COURTLOVE : We shall not fail.

PLYABLE : Gentlemen, you are too ceremonious.

COURTLOVE : Your pardon, madam, we should be wanting not to pay our respects, where they are so justly due; and an equality of condition permits it. Besides, madam, 'tis the custom here in Town, for us gentlemen of the livery to bear our masters a back-hand, and offer our services, in a civil way, to the ladies' women whom they court.

GAYLIFE (*to Mrs. Plyable, formally*) : And but that we looked upon you as a degree above us, to which we durst not raise our hopes, we should have taken the liberty to have begun by paying our duties to you.

PLYABLE : O dear sir, though a head servant in my good master's family, and entrusted with the care of the young ladies, I still am but a servant.

GAYLIFE : Then, madam, you must permit us the honour of saluting you.

[*Gaylife and Young Courtlove salute Mrs. Plyable.*]

HARRIET : So, I find it will come round !

FANNY : There's no going back now.

[*Gaylife and Young Courtlove salute the ladies.*]

COURTLOVE (*to Harriet*) : I hope, pretty maid,

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

you'll pardon the liberty we have taken to suppose a custom, without which we could never have enjoyed the pleasure of tasting lips whose sweetness makes probably the warmest description poet yet made.

GAYLIFE (*to Fanny*): And that leaves behind it such a sting, as makes even pain agreeable.

PLYABLE: Psha, psha, you make 'em blush with your compliments. They are not used to such language.

GAYLIFE: Then with your and their leaves, we'll instruct 'em. What say you, pretty maids? Shall we?

HARRIET: We shall be very much obliged to you, for the pains you will take with us.

FANNY: We are willing to learn anything, that may be for our goods.

COURTLOVE: That's well said. But, for the present, we must be satisfied with assuring you we'll neglect no opportunity to improve your knowledge. Our duty now calls us away, but we shall return with our masters immediately, and will then begin our lessons. Your most obedient servants.

[Exeunt Young Courtlove and Gaylife, bowing very low to Mrs. Plyable.]

PLYABLE: Marry come up. You shall indeed instruct and give lessons to my young ladies!

HARRIET: My dear Ply, don't be uneasy, consider they took us for their equals, and said nothing but what was very civil and polite.

FANNY: I'm sure there was no harm in what they said.

PLYABLE: Nay, if there had been, who can you blame for it, but yourselves? You must be disguised

like your maids, forsooth, and kissed and slabbered by footmen ! It is all your own doing. I've no hand in it.

FANNY : Well, we'll take it upon ourselves. Prithee be but easy, and don't give any room for suspicion, by your over-care for us.

HARRIET : If they should offer at any indecent liberties, either by word or action, I warrant you we shall know how to put a stop to it at once.

PLYABLE : Well, I'll be patient, and see what will come of it. But I'll not be blind; and if I should happen to see clearer than you—

HARRIET : You'll tell us what you see. But come, let's go in, and prepare for the coming of the lovers themselves.

[Exeunt.

Enter Rose and Jenny.]

JENNY : Harkee, Rose, be advised by me, and this frolic of our mistresses shall be the making of us.
ROSE : As how?

JENNY : We already pass for them; and their lovers, gentlemen of family and fortune, are to make love to us. Now, girl, if we could contrive some means to cheat our young ladies, and marry the gallants, we are made for ever.

ROSE : Excellent design ! If we can but find some invention to be married immediately : that once done, it will be too late to repent.

JENNY : The thought warms me. Methinks I am already Mrs. Courtlove : the envy of my own, and the delight of the other sex. A thousand lovers kneel before me, and offer up a thousand bleeding hearts—I take 'em all.

ROSE : How, all ! What, leave none for me ?

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

JENNY : I had forgot thee, in the soft delusion. But come, let's in, and think of some plot to bring this about. Hush, we are summoned. 'Tis not our time yet.

Exeunt.

Scene 2

Sir William's House.

Enter Jerry and Frank, dressed like their masters, Frank surveying himself as he comes in.

JERRY : What dost examine thyself for?

FRANK : To see if it was possible for the nicest eye to find me out. I vow I think not.

JERRY : Prithee leave fooling, and think on the character you are to represent.

FRANK : Then I must not leave fooling. For the whole life of such, are but different scenes of folly. But come, suppose we should practise a lesson against our masters' return? You shall be my mistress; question me a little.

JERRY : What shall I ask you?

FRANK : Anything, man; anything.

JERRY : Come on then. And pray, Mr. Gaylife, how do you employ your time here?

FRANK : Thou hast posed me at once. O Lord, madam, beaux never employ time; they only pass it away. We meet at one another's houses, as soon as we are up, which is about twelve o'clock; where we are sure first to disturb the neighbours, by the intolerable noise we make; after which we break-fast, and, in the height of our mirth, when we are

wound up to a certain pitch, cups, tea-pots, and saucers fly about the room, and very often out of the window. That done, we generally talk over the last night's gallantry. But here, madam, I must stop short, for fear I should give pain to the only woman for whose sake I could renounce the pleasures of such a life. Then of course she'll appear concerned at the thought of my former amours. This will give me an opportunity of curing her fears, by some expressions of fondness, which I shall let fall artfully. Then will she look at me, with languishing eyes. Then will I catch her in my arms, and press her so close! (*Catches Frank in his arms.*)

[*Enter Young Courtlove and Gaylife.*]

JERRY : 'Sdeath, sirrah, I'm not your mistress.

FRANK : That's true. I did not think of it. But 'tis no great matter. Any object will do, for the passion we are capable of feeling.

COURTLOVE : Hey! what's the matter, Frank?

FRANK : Sir, I was only taking a lesson beforehand.

COURTLOVE : 'Tis well—is my father returned yet?

JERRY : No, sir.

COURTLOVE : That's well. His presence, at first, might prevent our designs. We'll leave word, we are gone before; and, d'you hear, let the general course of your behaviour be such, as may give the highest disgust.

JERRY : Sir, with humble submission, you are a little out in your politics. For though they should dislike us for our, or rather your impertinences, since we are to pass for you, it does not follow, when they come to be undeceived, they will dislike you.

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

GAYLIFE : Jerry is in the right.

JERRY : I rather think to ingratiate ourselves with them will answer your purpose better. And this we may do, and blind Sir William's eyes still; for he has given us the same instructions, with respect to our general behaviour.

COURTLOVE : I only fear, if he should perceive anything of that, he'll make the discovery before the women are sufficiently piqued; and we must either marry 'em, or fly out at once.

GAYLIFE : For that very reason, the sooner we set about it the better.

JERRY : You can't conceive with what rapidity we shall conquer.

FRANK : D'you think a couple of raw, country girls can resist such an appearance? Formerly women, indeed, looked beyond an outside; but now—

'Tis glittering objects only can delight,
And those that gayest dress, best please the sight.

ACT THREE

Scene 1

Violetta's apartment.

Enter Violetta in men's, Lettice in women's clothes.

LETTICE : I'm afraid, madam, it will be impossible to escape entering into conversation with Mr. Bel-lair. He saw me as I came in, and I'm sure will watch for me as I go out. What shall I say to him?

VIOLETTA : Anything but the truth, as yet. Endeavour to sound his inclinations, give him assurances, that he has never been wronged. (*Lettice laughs.*) What do you laugh at?

LETTICE : At the task you have set me. For Heaven's sake, madam, what arguments can I use to convince him of that, when he surprises me coming from his rival's apartment? For so he takes you to be, after the fine story you have told him.

VIOLETTA : I did not indeed reflect—

LETTICE : I have a thought that promises fairer. I'll deny that you know any such person as Mr. Careless, and say that I came of myself to inquire for him, but that the maid of the house, through mistake, carried me to a strange gentleman, meaning you, whom I never saw in my life before, who used me in so rude a manner.

VIOLETTA : A good invention; about it straight. I warrant him upon the watch below.

LETTICE : I fly.

VIOLETTA : Wait for me at the inn. After I have seen him, when he comes directly from you, and worked him up so as to disbelieve everything that you said in justification of me, I'll leave him, and

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

for the better execution of a design I have in my head, will meet you at the inn.

LETTICE : I shall expect you there.

[*Exit Lettice.*]

VIOLETTA : So far matters go well : I shall have him here soon, in greater perplexity than before. And what with my confidence in maintaining the truth of my intrigue with myself, and Lettice's denying my knowing anything of Careless, it shall go hard but in this struggle I shall be able to discover the true state of his mind. Ha, whom have we here ! My old landlady ! Come, I suppose, to make tenders of her stale affections. What a conquest have I made ! I'm in such good humour, that I don't care if I divert myself with her a little.

[*Enter Widow.*]

WIDOW : Alone ! The opportunity's favourable.

VIOLETTA : My dear widow ! This visit's kind. But nobody enters here without paying toll. (*Seizes Widow.*)

WIDOW : Fie, Mr. Careless, you kiss one so hard, I protest, I'm quite flustered. But I come to chide you.

VIOLETTA : Me, Widow ?

WIDOW : Yes, you, sir. What, now I warrant you think no woman could have the heart to chide you ?

VIOLETTA : Not I, indeed. But I don't know that I have given you any occasion, Widow.

WIDOW : Young men never think they give widows occasion to chide them, let 'em use them ever so ill.

VIOLETTA : Dear Widow, explain yourself.

WIDOW : Pray, who was that young gentlewoman that came from you just now? Why, you may laugh, but I assure you, Mr. Careless, I don't suffer any such doings in my house. I'll harbour no rakes.

VIOLETTA (*aside*) : She's afraid anybody should share with her.

WIDOW : Come, come, sir, what was her business here?

VIOLETTA : Honourable, I assure you. She came from her lady, to whom I make my addresses in an honourable way.

WIDOW : Addresses in an honourable way! Ah, a fine story that, if you could make me believe it. I know what the honourable ways of such young sparks are. But if you are really serious, (*prinking*) there are women in the world, and not despicable neither, that would—

VIOLETTA : I thought, madam, you was an enemy to rakes, and would suffer no such doings in your house.

WIDOW : You're so quick, but all young men are so, there's no keeping up with them. I must instruct you, Mr. Careless; I have lived in the world a long time, and have had to do, I mean in an honest way, with all sorts of men. There are two kinds of rakes; there is the active, and the passive rake. The active rake uses unlawful means, seduces, betrays, deceives, goes about seeking whom he may devour. The passive rake lies still, waits till he is solicited, at proper hints given; for a woman never solicits openly. The active rake is a beast of prey, a woman ought to fly him : the passive, a tame, domestic animal, a woman may play with. But, Mr. Careless, I've a secret to tell you.

VIOLETTA : So! now 'twill out.—To tell me, Widow?

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

WIDOW : Yes, you. There is a lady—(*prinking herself*)

VIOLETTA : Ay, 'tis so. What an old house have I brought on my head!

WIDOW : Neither young, nor old, but very personable, I assure you—sure he'll understand me—that has seen you, since you came hither, with no indifferent eyes.

VIOLETTA : I'll try, if I can't shame this old beldam. Nay, now Widow, you rally me, for since I set foot in this house, no female eye, but yours, has shot a ray at me.

WIDOW : O fie, Mr. Careless! what d'you mean?—me, suspect me!—I see he can take a hint; good instruction is not thrown away. I'll lay myself more open still.

VIOLETTA : Suspect you, Widow! I suspect nobody. 'Slife, her advances are too quick. I shan't be allowed time to capitulate. I only say you rally me.

WIDOW : No, in truth, sweet sir, I scorn to rally so complete a gentleman. What I say is true, and you'll find it so.

VIOLETTA : Impossible! I'm not so vain to believe it. What! so staid, so motherly a gentlewoman as you, look with light eyes! No, it can't be.

WIDOW : Staid and motherly! I don't like that. Fie, Mr. Careless, what an expression! But, sweet sir, shall I really tell you who this lady is?

VIOLETTA : I must change my battery, or she'll dismount it. What, have not you laughed at me enough, Widow? Take care how you jest. Perhaps I may take in earnest, what you mean only in joke. And a mistake is not so easily remedied.

WIDOW : Oh! dear sir, anybody may mistake. I should never take any you could make, amiss, I'm sure.

THE DOUBLE DECEIT

VIOLETTA : I've nothing left but to fly for it. Oh ! no, thank Heaven, here's some succour come.

[*Enter maid, whispers to Violetta.*]

WIDOW : Unlucky interruption ! (*to the maid*) 'Tis well, I'll come this instant. Mr. Careless, I'm obliged to leave you, but I shan't stay. I'll return presently, and finish the discovery I just began. Nay, I assure you, 'tis as I tell you. Your servant, sweet sir, I shall not stay.

[*Exit Widow.*]

VIOLETTA : Nor I, I give you my word, till your return. Is it possible, women can so mistake themselves ! But she's not worth a thought. I'll in, and wait, till Bellair returns.

Exit.

Scene 2

The Street.

Enter Lettice, followed by Bellair.

BELLAIR : Whither so fast, Mrs. Lettice ? What ! overlook your old friends !

LETTICE : Bless me, Mr. Bellair, you are the person I was looking for ! Welcome from Holland, sir ; I'm overjoyed to see you. Oh sir, how could you

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

run away so? We have such weeping and sobbing! 'Tis well you're found; we should have embarked else in a day or two.

BELLAIR: Right chambermaid! Lying is as familiar to them, as their mistresses' old clothes, and fits as easy on them, though not made for them. Whence came you now, Mrs. Lettice? Come, tell the truth, what was your errand?

LETTICE: Sir?

BELLAIR: Nay, nay, Lettice, you and I used to understand one another better. Let this speak for me.

LETTICE: O fie, Mr. Bellair, what d'you mean? Offer to bribe me!

BELLAIR: Whence come you, I say?

LETTICE: As if you did not know.

BELLAIR (*aside*): I know but too well. Come, come, no trifling, Mrs. Lettice.

LETTICE: You won't say it then?

BELLAIR: You make me mad.

LETTICE: Nay, you have no reason to be angry. If anybody has, I'm sure 'tis I. I have been so used on your account!

BELLAIR: S'dearth, what do you mean? Explain yourself.

LETTICE: What do I mean? What do you mean, by keeping such company! A woman that's tolerably pretty is forced to run the Gantlope, if she wants to come near you.

BELLAIR: I shall run distracted! Dear Mrs. Lettice, if you have not lost the faculty of talking in an intelligible manner, speak that I may understand you.

LETTICE: Well then, sir, my lady, vexed at your abrupt departure, has almost broke her heart for you. She is just come to Town, fully resolved, if

she had not found you, to have followed you to Holland. But, by good luck, she heard you were returned, and lodged at Mrs. Lettwell's. I am just come from thence; and the maid, whether by mistake or design, I can't tell, carried me into a room, and left me with such a raking devil, my arms are black and blue with struggling. I made my escape at last, but was in such a fright, I never thought of going back to ask for you.

BELLAIR : Lettice !

LETTICE : Sir.

BELLAIR : D'you expect I should believe you ?

LETTICE : Believe me ! When did I ever deceive you ?

BELLAIR : I never found you out, indeed.

LETTICE : Found me out ! Is this the recompense for my sincerity ?

BELLAIR : Pr'ythee be pacified, Lettice. Here, I beseech you. (*Gives her money.*)

LETTICE : Psha, you think now this will satisfy me ?

BELLAIR : If that won't, let this, and this. (*He gives more.*)

LETTICE : Well, I am calm again. I can't hold out long. I am good natured. But pray, Mr. Bellair, what was the reason of your not coming the night my mistress sent for you ?

BELLAIR : I must have patience, or I shall never come at the truth.

LETTICE : We sat up all night, but in such concern and fears ! and next morning we heard you had left your lodgings in a great hurry, that night, and had taken post to Hull ; from thence we learnt, you were embarked for Holland ; but are yet to know the reason of your going.

BELLAIR : Was there ever such confidence seen ! S'death, I can hold no longer. I thought your mis-

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

tress was not unacquainted with a plot of her own contriving.

LETTICE : A plot of her own contriving ! Bless me, Mr. Bellair, are you in your right senses ?

BELLAIR : I don't know how long I shall continue so : pr'ythee, Lettice, tell me, how long has your mistress been intimate with Mr. Careless ? She ought to have chosen a more discreet lover, not one that makes a confidant of a rival.

LETTICE : So ! Now it comes home. Mr. Careless ! A confidant of a rival !

BELLAIR : Yes, yes. S'death, can you deny my finding a man in the garden, and going to Violetta's apartment ?

LETTICE : I believe you might. And what then ?

BELLAIR : Did I not fight this happy intruder ? And, as I thought, killed him, and fled for it, till my friends writing me word in Holland, nobody had been killed, nor any duel heard of, I returned.

LETTICE : I don't know how they should.—And was it for this you fled ? You might have spared yourself a good deal of concern, and my mistress too. I could have set that matter right.

BELLAIR : I thank you, 'tis already done. I have found one that has saved you that trouble.

LETTICE : Some villain has betrayed my mistress. Hear the truth from me. You know my Lady Lovewell's daughter lodged at Scarborough with us. A gentleman, whom her father disapproved, made his addresses in secret to her. Her father coming unexpectedly down, she could no longer see him in her apartment, and as there was a great intimacy between my lady and her, she lent her her apartment for the purpose ; and he, when he came, was to ask for Violetta. My mistress wrote to you,

to desire a meeting with you that very night, to acquaint you with it : but, I suppose, you and this gentleman met, and, by mistake, taking each other for rivals, fought; and for this, my poor mistress is traduced and abused by some villain, that has some design on her, and begins by sowing dissension between you two.

BELLAIR (*aside*) : This has a face of truth. But till I can reconcile Careless's knowledge of this secret to probability, and not to his being a party concerned, I must still remain in doubt.

LETTICE : It works as I could wish. Already he almost disbelieves the other story. Mr. Bellair, what are you musing about?

BELLAIR : I was thinking on this curst mistake, that has caused me already so much pain.

LETTICE : Think of it no more. I shall rejoice my mistress with the news of my having seen you, and your being undeceived.

BELLAIR : Not so entirely neither. However, I'll dissemble with her. Haste thee, good Lettice, to thy mistress, and tell her I am impatient till I see her. I'll go back, and wait thy return at home.

LETTICE : I'll go. But, dear sir, give the maid in charge, to make no more mistakes, and not carry me to that young devil's room.

BELLAIR : A curse on thee, for mentioning him. The thought of seeing my dearest Violetta had already got the better of the poison he had instilled.

LETTICE : What, was he the author of their distrusts ! Hang him, a dog in a manger; he's only fit to spoil sport, not make any. Don't see him, Mr. Bellair,—till I've prepared him :—You are naturally jealous, and I'll be hanged, if he don't undo all I've been doing, before I come back.

BELLAIR : Never fear. Begone, dear Lettice.

ACT THREE, SCENE THREE

LETTICE : Your servant, sir :—you may expect me back, almost as soon as you get there yourself.

[*Exit Lettice.*]

BELLAIR : Your servant. What does she mean by desiring me not to see Careless? There is some mystery in it, which must be cleared up. Whilst there is the least doubt remaining in my mind, I can't be easy. I'll go and sound this young boaster once more; I can never believe Violetta such as he would represent her. Perhaps, he means the other lady Lettice talked of, whom to disguise, he calls Violetta. Ha! it must be so. Already my mind is easier in that thought. Dear Violetta, if thou art cleared, I am happy.

Exit.

Scene 3

Sir William's House.

Enter Sir William and servant.

SIR WILLIAM : Gone, say you?

SERVANT : Yes, sir, the moment before you came in. I wonder you did not meet 'em.

SIR WILLIAM : 'Tis well.

[*Exit servant.*]

I don't like this impatience. I suspect some trick. When I first proposed the thing, they were back-

ward enough, till I agreed to their disguise; and now they're so eager, they have not patience to wait for me. Hold, let me reflect a little though, and not be too hasty. Ay, it must be so. I suppose they liked them, when they saw 'em, and are now in a hurry to put their plot in execution. Ah, rogues! Well, I'll after though, for fear of mistakes.

Exit.

Scene 4

An apartment at the Widow's.

Enter Jerry and Frank, followed by Young Courtlove and Gaylife. To them, Harriet and Fanny.

HARRIET : Gentlemen, our ladies will wait on you immediately.

FRANK : 'Tis very well, pretty maid. Hey, lackeys!
COURTLOVE and GAYLIFE : Sir.

FRANK : Entertain these virgins, while my friend and I walk about, and admire the beauty of these apartments.—You're not sorry for the office, I believe.

[They walk about, and talk in dumb show.]

COURTLOVE (*to Harriet*) : If all our master's commands were as agreeable as this, our duty would be the greatest pleasure of our lives.

HARRIET : I'm afraid, sir, your politeness makes you forget truth. When pleasure becomes a duty, it loses of its relish.

ACT THREE, SCENE FOUR

GAYLIFE : When the object of pleasure has no intrinsic worth in itself, it may be as you say.

FANNY : As good an opinion as I am inclined to have of your discernment, I cannot compliment you with penetration enough to have been able to judge, in so little a time, what intrinsic worth we have.

COURTLOVE : There can be no harm in judging favourably.

HARRIET : No. But there may be danger of mistaking. Here are our ladies.

[*Enter Rose and Jenny.*]

ROSE : Gentlemen, your humble servant. Excuse us for receiving you in this disorderly manner.

JENNY : If we had had more time, we should have received you with more ceremony.

FRANK : No apology, dear ladies. Ceremony, among people of fashion, is quite laid aside. The *beau monde* are always free, when they meet, though they never have seen one another.

ROSE : 'Tis quite otherwise in the country. People that have been years acquainted there, scarce dare speak to one another. There's my cousin the 'squire never comes within three yards of one, and when he speaks, can scarcely be heard, unless when he gets a cup in his head; and then he rides upon one's chair, and makes more noise, than when he is hallooing after his hounds.

FRANK : Ha, ha ! prettily rallied. But, dear ladies, consider my friend and I are tongue-tied, and eye-bound, till you direct us where to look, and to whom to address the passion that labours in our breast.

JENNY : A very odd passion that of yours, that waits to know whom it must address to.

THE DOUBLE DECEIT

FRANK : Ah, ladies! don't let that surprise you; know your own power, and be satisfied; either of you may command a passion, when and where you please.

JENNY : This fellow is such a coxcomb, I don't like him. Come, sir, I'll spare my sister the confusion of declaring herself first; your friend, sir, leaves me room for choice; as eldest, I claim a right to speak first, and receive you, sir, as my servant.

JERRY : And I hire myself with pleasure.

HARRIET : How naturally they fall into their own state of life, in their discourse!

FRANK : Then, madam, I am at liberty to present my heart, where of itself it would have offered its service.

ROSE : Dear sir, you make me blush, by so kind a declaration.

FRANK : Blush on. 'Tis a sure sign of love, and I am happy in that sign. Let me perish, if ever I saw so fine a creature!

JERRY : Pr'ythee, Gaylife, give over this whining. Do you think we've nothing to do but to listen to you? We should rather think of preparing some diversion for these ladies.

FRANK : Lookee, Courtlove, every man has his way. Some choose the polite, some the grosser manner. For my part, and I speak the opinion of all the fine gentlemen of my stamp, I would have my sense like myself, well dressed.

JERRY : That is, because both want it.

FRANK : Envy, by this light! Beside, when we approach beauty, we should be soft like it. Like to like.

JENNY : Never mind him, Mr. Courtlove, I like your plainness, as well as my sister does his politeness. I hate art.

ACT THREE, SCENE FOUR

JERRY : You see I use none. 'Tis the force of personal merit with us, whenever we succeed.

JENNY : And the more glorious for you, when you do.

JERRY : Just one way of thinking. Ask all the young fellows that one meets in public places, why they go as I do? 'Tis not for want, for they have great estates, but they will owe no favour to any merit, but what is in themselves.

FRANK : Which is the reason why they never receive any favour from the ladies, ha, ha !

JERRY : We don't brag—

ROSE : Filthy creatures ! Besides that, it makes one sick to look at 'em. The vanity to expect one should fall in love with their odious outsides, is intolerable. Now the man that dresses, shews he has an humble opinion of himself, and is willing to make use of such helps as art can afford.

JERRY : A Beau dress from a principle of humility ! O Lord ! O Lord ! The solitaire owes its birth to humility, as well as the nice toupee, and full-skirted flap. These wings here, that almost sweep the ground (*pointing to the straps of the other's shoes*), and are like a solitaire to the feet, are the humble produce of the Beau's modest opinion of himself, I warrant you. Ha, ha !

JENNY : These sleeves too, I suppose, descend so low, out of a principle of humility. Ha, ha !

FRANK : Lookee, dear Courtlove, you may be as nasty and as rough as you please. Where you'll find one woman of sense, that will take the disagreeable trouble of wading through the filth in which thy merit lies intrenched, I shall find a hundred that will make themselves happy in the outworks of mine.

ROSE : To me, there's nothing so pretty as a well-

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dressed man. It adds a grace to his looks, and his words have double force of persuasion.

FRANK : Charmer, angel, I expire !

JERRY : Undress him, and his merit's gone.

[*Enter Sir William.*]

JENNY : I protest, Mr. Gaylife, you've a vast deal of wit.

SIR WILLIAM : Has he so? (*Goes up to the company.*) Ladies, your servant. My lawyer detained me, else I had waited on you sooner, and introduced these hopeful gentlemen to you myself. But their impatience was too nimble for me. They were in great haste; but I can't blame 'em.

JENNY : Indeed, sir, we should have taken it very much amiss, if they had waited for the ceremony of an introduction. Mr. Courtlove's merit wanted no introducer here.

SIR WILLIAM : Very fine, truly !

COURTLOVE (*to Gaylife*) : The fondness of that girl will ruin all our schemes.

SIR WILLIAM (*to Jerry and Frank*) : Harkee, dogs, behave in such a manner, that they may hate the sight of you, or I'll break your heads before your mistresses—body o' me, I shall have the rogues inveigle away the girls' inclinations, while my wife discovers they're making love to their maids. (*Goes to 'em.*)

JERRY : Do you observe how fond they are of us? 'Tis pity it should be thrown away.

FRANK : Hush. I understand you.

SIR WILLIAM (*to Young Courtlove and Gaylife*) : Observe what I tell you, and see that my commands are punctually obeyed in everything, else I shall put the livery on the right back.

ACT THREE, SCENE FOUR

COURTLOVE : Be but easy, sir, and give 'em their way this time.

SIR WILLIAM : Well, I'll try you a little farther. Why, how now, gentlemen. What, have you no scheme of pleasure to entertain your mistress with?

JERRY : Your pardon, sir, this is Masquerade Night. What say you, ladies, shall we go to the Masquerade?

ROSE : Masquerade ! Pray what is the Masquerade?

JERRY : The Masquerade is—

SIR WILLIAM : I'll tell you, madam. The Masquerade is a place calculated for the ease of delicate consciences, where, under the covert of a mask, a lady of strict virtue, that in another place would sink into the earth at a double entendre, not only hears, but returns 'em there, with pleasure and heightened raillery.

JENNY : What, and do they wear their masks all the while? Oh Lud, that's pure for bashful girls ! They need not blush at anything, but may say and do just as they please.

SIR WILLIAM : Ay, and so they do.

FRANK : Right. For since nobody can see their faces, nor know who they are, what signifies all they say or do?

ROSE : Well, but when shall we go?

JERRY : This night. Here, Frank, why Frank !

COURTLOVE : Did you call, sir?

JERRY : Call, sir, yes. But you're always so full of your own affairs, that you neglect those of your master. How often have I told you of this ! Ladies, take care of your maids; my rogue there has a hawk's eye at a pretty wench. (*Young Courtlove holds up his hand.*) Hey, what does he mean !—Come nearer, sirrah.—Sir, I perceive you are angry at something, but I don't know at what.

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COURTLOVE: Sirrah, contrive to take yourself and comrade and the two ladies away, and leave me and Mr. Gaylife alone with the maids, or I'll—

JERRY: No threats, sir, it shall be done—(*aside*) That's what I want. Here, go to Mr. Sportlove's, and desire he would send me four Masquerade tickets at subscription price.

[*Enter servant, gives Sir William a letter.*]

COURTLOVE: Is that what I told you, sirrah?—Sir, you forget he sent 'em this morning. They lie on the table in your closet.

JERRY: Then go fetch 'em hither. (*Young Courtlove holds up his hand.*) Stay, there's time enough, now I think on't.

SIR WILLIAM: Ladies, this letter comes from your father. He writes me word, that having dispatched the business that detained him on the road sooner than he expected, he hopes to be in Town, at latest, by tomorrow noon. He desires, in a postscript, that I would get the writings fairly engrossed, and ready for signing, that the marriage may be solemnized without delay.

ROSE: Sir, my father ordered us to obey you in everything.

JENNY: We are ready to follow your directions.

SIR WILLIAM: Why, that's frankly said. (*Goes to his son, etc.*)

HARRIET: Our disguised lovers look a little discontented.

FANNY: The old gentleman, I suppose, wants to bring matters to a dénouement, which they don't much care for, if we may take their own words for it.

ACT THREE, SCENE FOUR

JERRY : Come, ladies, what say you? Shall we go and choose dresses?

JENNY : With all our hearts. It will pass away an hour or two agreeably.

ROSE : We'll put our things on within.

[Exeunt Jenny and Rose.]

JERRY (*to the gentlemen*) : Do you go and get a coach. It will not be proper to take our own for fear of being known. (*to Sir William*) Sir, I have a word or two to say to you.

[Exeunt Young Courtlove and Gaylife.]

SIR WILLIAM : To me?

JERRY : You'll forgive my freedom, sir.

SIR WILLIAM : Consider, we're alone, you dog, if—

JERRY : Sir, I shall behave with all due regard. The business I have to tell you is this. We have already engaged the ladies to go to the Masquerade : it will be necessary to treat them with dresses and tickets, and to defray some other expenses, a cool hundred—

SIR WILLIAM : Did not I forewarn you, sirrah?

JERRY : Nay, but dear sir—

SIR WILLIAM : A cool hundred, you say?

JERRY : Yes, sir, between us.

SIR WILLIAM : Between you?

FRANK : Will be more than sufficient.

SIR WILLIAM : I believe it will.

FRANK : We'll account with you for the remainder.

SIR WILLIAM : Oh, oh ! You'll account me for the remainder. Why, that's very well. I did not understand it so. That alters the case entirely.

JERRY : Yes, sir. And behave in such a manner,

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that they shall detest us before tomorrow morning —if I can but compass my design, I can answer for that.

SIR WILLIAM : Here then, sirrah, here are twenty guineas apiece for you. I'll make up the hundred, do you make your words good.

FRANK : Sir, I humbly thank you. Come, sir, I'll shew you the way, *sans ceremonie*. (*Going.*)

SIR WILLIAM : Hold, hold, the guardian always goes before his charge.

FRANK : Sir, I ask your pardon.

[*Exit Sir William.*]

JERRY : In a little time, my dear dad, I hope we shall both get rid of you; and then we shan't stand upon ceremony.

Fortune, like bashful virgins, still is coy,
But yields with pleasure to the forward boy.

Exeunt.

ACT FOUR

Scene I

Enter Jerry and Frank.

JERRY : Courage, lad; our affairs go swimmingly. The girls are as foolish—

FRANK : And as fond, as heart can wish.

JERRY : The old gentleman is almost mad, to see the progress we have made; and, if I'm not mistaken, a little doubtful of our integrity; so that there's no time to be lost. Should he be impatient, and discover us, we should still be a couple of poor rogues indeed.

FRANK : What then is to be done?

JERRY : You know we have engaged them to go to the Masquerade tonight: they are now getting themselves ready to go choose dresses. Instead of which, we'll find some excuse to be married immediately; if we can but give them any tolerable reasons for it, I dare swear, they'll readily agree to it.

FRANK : Ay! but where is the licence? This is no canonical hour.

JERRY : What a stupid rogue thou art! Is not any hour canonical; and an inclination to be married, licence enough, when we have money to pay for it?

FRANK : But still, I'm afraid of our masters.

JERRY : Cowardly rogue! Thou deserv'st to be a poor dog all thy life. Why, let 'em know it, when 'tis done, as soon as they please. Our wives' fortunes will make us their equals; and then, blood, sir, I shall wear a sword as well as they. Come, let's go in, and seek our future spouses.

FRANK : I've one scruple still. Is their fortune in their own hands?

JERRY : Was there ever such an unreasonable dog!

Why, you unconscionable villain, is not your state mean enough to run any risk to get out of it!

FRANK : Yes. But one's liberty, Jerry, one's liberty; to part with that—When a man's married, he's but half what he was. Half his power, half his sense, half his pleasure is gone. His wife shares all but his misfortunes; and as for them, being the weaker vessel, she cannot bear her part.

JERRY : Pr'ythee, Frank, no more of these foolish reflections. Hush; here come our future spouses.

[*Enter Rose and Jenny, followed by Harriet and Fanny.*]

ROSE : Come, gentlemen, are you ready? Sir William is within, busy with the lawyer: we'll take this time to go. We shall be back before he has done.

FRANK : Ladies, we attend you.

JENNY : Shall we take our maids?

JERRY : By no means; that would spoil all. We leave our men; their liveries would discover us; and we should be known too soon. (*aside*)

JENNY : As I could wish. Now, fortune, assist us.

JERRY : Where are our men?

HARRIET : Below at the door, waiting.

JERRY : Come then—this is the night, that either makes me, or undoes me quite.

Exeunt.

Scene 2

Violetta's Apartment.

Enter Widow.

WIDOW : Nobody here! That's well. I'll hide my-

ACT FOUR, SCENE TWO

self in this closet, and when Mr. Careless comes into his room, take an opportunity of bolting out upon him. Ha! what have we here? Mr. Bellair and him, as I live! Let me stand aside and listen.

[*Enter Violetta, followed by Bellair.*]

BELLAIR : Nay, sir, I will have satisfaction. You've wronged the woman on earth I love and value most.

WIDOW : Sure he means me.

VIOLETTA : O charming sound! You shall have satisfaction, sir: for know, I dare fight, and will maintain the truth of which I've said.

BELLAIR : Ha!

VIOLETTA : Nay, and what's more, I here declare I've lain with her.

WIDOW : Impudent young rogue! Yet it becomes him too. He can't mean me.

BELLAIR : 'sdeath, you—(*Hand to his sword.*)

WIDOW : Poor Mr. Careless will be killed by this boisterous ruffian.

VIOLETTA : Hold, sir; don't say what in honour I can't hear without revenging. Mr. Bellair, let's be cool. You're my friend. On that consideration I've declared thus much to you. If I don't prove to you what I've said, then use me like a scoundrel.

BELLAIR : Rest satisfied, I will.

VIOLETTA : I am content you should. But what proof do you expect? Will nothing but ocular demonstration do? Would you see us abed together?

BELLAIR : 'sdeath! Sir, do you mock me? Take care.

VIOLETTA : No; by my honour, I don't. Though that proof would not be so difficult to be given, perhaps. (*laughs*) Nay, be not so warm.

BELLAIR : Well, I'm calm. But don't imagine I believe a word of what you say. Violetta's honour can receive no stain from such an idle tongue. But be assured, young sir, the attempt you've made shall be deeply washed away in your heart's blood. Forgive my patience, Violetta, that thus tamely I hear you wronged, most vilely wronged. Even in my warmest jealousy, I never harboured a thought that dared suppose the least against your reputation, and shall I see it mangled thus by strangers?

VIOLETTA : How his passion moves me ! Believe me, dear Bellair, the warmth which you express makes you still more dear to me, and me more eager to convince you she will be here this evening.

BELLAIR : She ! what she ? (*With a mixture of peevishness and anger.*)

VIOLETTA : Your Violetta.

BELLAIR : I tell you, sir, you are mistaken, or else conceal her real name. You mean, my Lord Lovewell's daughter, she that lodged at Scarborough, to whom you made your addresses unknown to her father. Come, come, I know the secret.

VIOLETTA : A story invented by me and her woman to deceive you. You had this intelligence from her.

BELLAIR : I had indeed.

VIOLETTA : Then hear me out : Violetta will be here within an hour or two. Do you stay in my apartment, put my nightgown on, and lie on the couch in such a manner, that she may not at first sight see your face. If she does not fly into your arms, with the warmest expressions of tenderness, then wash away the wrongs I've done you in my blood. I shan't oppose your vengeance : but if she does—

BELLAIR : Why, if she does—I'll enjoy her first, that my revenge may be complete, then reproach and

ACT FOUR, SCENE TWO

leave her for ever, and never harbour one generous thought of the sex while I live.

VIOLETTA : Is your servant here?

BELLAIR : Yes. Within there.

[*Enter servant.*]

VIOLETTA : If anybody asks for me, conduct her hither to your master.

SERVANT : It shall be done, sir.

VIOLETTA : And, d'you hear? let the room be quite dark, and keep at a proper distance without, but still within call. It may not be quite safe, nor prudent, to trust his passion too far. However, I shall bring Lettice with me. Mr. Bellair, I take my leave, and wish you success.

BELLAIR : I'll but step to my apartment, and return in an instant, and endeavour to forget myself on the couch, till I awake to revenge.

[*Exeunt severally.*]

[*Enter Widow.*]

WIDOW : Forget yourself on the couch till you awake to revenge. Ha, ha. Perhaps I may awake you sooner, and to something sweeter than revenge. Mr. Bellair, after all, is a fine person, and too much a man of honour to expose me, if he should find me out. Opportunity is a terrible thing, at my time of life, when they happen so seldom—Mark! The room dark!—lucky contrivance!—Keep at a proper distance without;—good!—but still within call. I don't know that I shall want you. Let me see. I'm to fly into his arms. Never doubt it. With the warmest expressions of tenderness. I warrant

THE DOUBLE DECEIT

you. Well, I'll into my covert, and wait the event. I have my excuse ready, if they should discover me.

Exit.

Scene 3

Another apartment.

Enter Young Courtlove, Gaylife, Harriet and Fanny.

COURTLOVE : At length we are free. And now, my pretty charmer, reign from this hour sole mistress of my heart.

GAYLIFE : Mine, from the first moment I beheld your beauty, has been its resigned slave.

HARRIET : This is very gallant. But what follows these romantic declarations?

FANNY : Are we to live on air, or the breath of love?

GAYLIFE : No, child, on more solid food. Be this a sample of the rich diet. (*Offer to kiss.*)

FANNY : Hold, sir, this is a food I am unacquainted with : I don't care to corrupt my taste.

COURTLOVE : Improve it, you would say. Is't not so?

HARRIET : All improvements in luxury are built on the corruption of natural taste.

COURTLOVE : So learned ! A very Socrates in petticoats. What school was you instructed in, child?

HARRIET : The school of nature, sir, which does not always bestow high birth and honours, but sense not to be unhappy without 'em, when they are not

ACT FOUR, SCENE THREE

our lot. You seem surprised to hear words from me, I need not blush to speak.

FANNY : And in this have shewn less generosity than we. We heard with pleasure, but expressed no surprise, at all you have said to us, since our first seeing each other; being taught to believe, that good sense and proper expression might sometimes wear a livery or a stuff gown, and not always be clothed with lace or rich brocades.

GAYLIFE : You surprise us still more; that we, who see daily the best of company, should refine our speech, and enlarge our ideas, is not surprising; but that you, bred up in the country—

HARRIET : A genius forms itself anywhere. But this is not to the purpose; I can't help saying, notwithstanding the good company you daily see, there are two things you have not learned yet.

COURTLOVE : What are they, my little instructor?

HARRIET : The first, good breeding; and the second, to have a better opinion of others, and a worse of yourselves. Come, let's go. Such treatment as this no mortal can bear; to be thought incapable of common sense. (*Going.*)

COURTLOVE : Hold yet awhile.

FANNY : What should I stay for?

GAYLIFE : To hear what I've to say.

[*Young Courtlove and Gaylife whisper.*]

HARRIET : What consultation are they upon now?

FANNY : Nay, the Lord knows.

GAYLIFE : Propose to marry them, to try 'em a little.

COURTLOVE : We'll marry you, child.

HARRIET : I scarce believe you're sincere.

COURTLOVE : We'll keep you then. Do you think us sincere now?

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HARRIET : I think you're impudent now.

FANNY : You seem, indeed, well qualified for that. Gentlemen of your cloth must needs be fine keepers. What a glorious life we shall lead! To be dressed in the cast-off clothes of your masters' mistresses, and fed with the cold remains of their tables, with which you stuff your greasy pockets as you take away. And on Sundays, or holidays, a pint of a new sort of wine, composed of the fragments of bottles, and the rinsing of glasses mixed together.

COURTLOVE : Ha, so pert! But suppose now this wit of yours should miscarry?

HARRIET : I don't know what you mean.

COURTLOVE (*aside*) : Shall I tell 'em who we are?

GAYLIFE (*aside*) : Do.

COURTLOVE : Suppose, instead of speaking to Mr. Gaylife and Mr. Courtlove's men, you are speaking to themselves.

HARRIET : How!

COURTLOVE : Nay, child, never start, for it is true. We are not what we seem, but gentlemen of birth and fortune.

FANNY : How, gentlemen! (*aside*) We knew that before.

GAYLIFE : Yes, gentlemen.

HARRIET : The knowledge of this makes it necessary for us to withdraw. We are no longer fit company for you, and beg pardon for the freedom we used before we knew you.

COURTLOVE : Hold, child, you mistake the matter quite. You are fit company for us, and fitter now than if we really were what we seem.

FANNY : Where there is an inequality, there can be no freedom; and without freedom, no agreeable commerce.

ACT FOUR, SCENE THREE

GAYLIFE : But there is a commerce, my pretty one, which creates a freedom, let the difference be ever so great.

HARRIET : 'Tis a commerce we don't desire to have, and shall never like.

COURTLOVE : What, before you know it !

FANNY : We can give a shrewd guess. Gentlemen like you seldom stoop to such as us, but with dishonest views; and I can answer for myself and my companion, that it will be only losing your time.

COURTLOVE : But suppose, for the possession of your heart, which, by the price I offer, you may be sure is dear to me, I should make a handsome provision for you for life? That puts you at once above necessity. The world, if you don't want their assistance, will respect you. Is not this better than subjecting yourself to the impertinent humours of a mistress, or the drudgery of any other service?

HARRIET : Sir, to talk to you of virtue, is to talk to you of a thing, I perceive, you have no knowledge of, and very little regard for. I shall therefore waive it, and only tell you, that being born of humble parents, and having never lived better, servitude, such as ours is, is natural to us, and we have no inclinations to change. Let those, who have lived well, and are reduced by misfortunes, listen to such proposals, and fly servitude and menial drudgery at the expense of reputation. The good natured part of the world will pity 'em, the rigid condemn 'em.

[Young Courtlove and Gaylife stare at each other.]

COURTLOVE : What the devil do they mean? I thought no chambermaid's heart was proof against a settlement.

GAYLIFE : 'sdeath, name the sum; that will mollify, I warrant you. This is too distant a view; they want something nearer, to dazzle their eyes.

COURTLOVE : Here, child, (*offers a purse*) as the best answer to your argument, is a purse with a hundred guineas in it. My friend there has a twin brother for your friend. This is a voluntary gift, for you to purchase some new necessaries to equip you handsomely.—How ! refuse a hundred guineas ! See the effects of a country education ! Why, child, there is not one single chambermaid in all this populous city, that would refuse a hundred shillings; but these shall be annually repeated, and secured beforehand, if I should die, or leave you. And while we continue together, you shall have double the sum to spend every year. Still unmoved ! Faith, child, if I could afford more, I would offer more, for you are very pretty. But a gentleman has so many other articles of expense, that two hundred pounds a year is as much as he can possibly spare for his *menus plaisirs*.

HARRIET : And more than he need for us. Sir, we've heard you out, and though the offer made is an insult to us, yet we think ourselves obliged to you for the reason that induces you to make it, which is an esteem and liking of our persons. To give you then an answer in one word, money can never buy us. If you can prevail any other way, try; we give you free leave. Love is the price I set on my heart.

FANNY : Mine can never be purchased by anything else.

GAYLIFE (*to Courtlove*) : So much the better : we shall get 'em much cheaper than we expected.

HARRIET : Perhaps not. If you can have any thought of marrying us, we are ready to hear you.

ACT FOUR, SCENE THREE

GAYLIFE : Unconscionable jades ! I see the reason of their refusal now ; they would have all or none.

COURTLOVE : That would be impossible, child. My father would disinherit me : but I'll tell you what we'll do, we'll marry your mistresses, to have an opportunity with you.

GAYLIFE : Agreed.

HARRIET (*to Fanny*) : Heaven forbid !

COURTLOVE : Come, Ned, let us go immediately to my father, and acquaint him we're willing to marry, and throw off our disguises at once. Our hearts unengaged, what signifies who we marry !

HARRIET : Hold, gentlemen ; if you do that, we'll leave our services this moment, and never see you more.

GAYLIFE : No matter. Come, Ned.

FANNY : Yet stay. I've thought of an expedient. Will you consent to marry us if we get your father's consent ?

GAYLIFE (*to Courtlove, laughing*) : There's no danger in making that promise.

COURTLOVE : I'll add another condition, however, to the bargain. Will you engage to be ours the way we offer, in case my father does not consent to make you his daughter ?

HARRIET : I do.

GAYLIFE : And you.

FANNY : I am content.

COURTLOVE : There wants nothing now but the formalities of signing and sealing. I know no wax that will keep a more lasting impression than this. (*Offers to kiss.*) Nay, child, if you won't bind the bargain, I am off.

HARRIET : Won't this do ? (*Offers her hand.*)

COURTLOVE : Impudent slut ! How she affects the

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fine lady!—a hand only!—Gad, 'tis a pretty one, soft and warm.

So in a play the yielding heroine gives
Her hand, the lover on his knees receives;
There, with fierce hopes, the blissful contract seals,
And future pleasures instantaneous feels.
Not so the chambermaid the livery vows
Receives, but this, and thus, and thus—

[*Takes her in his arms and kisses.*]

HARRIET : What are you doing ! Let me take breath for Heaven's sake. (*Breaks from him.*)

GAYLIFE : Ay, do so, and in the meantime, child, you and I will sign and seal in our turn.

FANNY : Hold, sir, as 'tis but one and the same contract, one signing and sealing will satisfy.

GAYLIFE : I see, child, you're a stranger to these kinds of proceedings. I must instruct you a little, If there were fifty parties in one contract, they must all set their hands and seals.

FANNY : Here then is my hand.

GAYLIFE : Ha, the same modest assurance as her sister there. I am resolved to fit her. (*Offers gravely to kiss her hand.*)

FANNY : Now I think on't, I won't. (*Draws it away.*)

GAYLIFE : Nay, then I must force the impression where I can make it. (*Kisses her.*)—And now 'tis down.

FANNY : Well then, I hope you are satisfied.

GAYLIFE : Yes, faith, and I think I never made a better bargain in my life.

FANNY : I don't repent.

HARRIET : Nor I. But as I believe the sooner the contract is put in execution the more agreeable it

ACT FOUR, SCENE THREE

will be to all, if you were to leave us now it would not be quite improper.

COURTLOVE : As you say, child, the sooner the deed is executed, the better. I can't allow much time. If you don't perform your contract by tomorrow noon, I shall sue you on your bond, and require bodily security.

[*Knock.*]

HARRIET (*to Fanny*) : Pr'ythee step out, and see who it is.

[*Fanny looks out.*]

FANNY : 'Tis the old knight. Gentlemen, I believe you had better withdraw. Here's a back door. Remember your promise.

GAYLIFE : Remember yours. That seems the most likely to be claimed first.

FANNY : You may be mistaken.

[*Exeunt gentlemen.*]

HARRIET : Here comes the old gentleman. Pr'ythee, Fanny, step aside, and leave me to manage him. He gave me a glance or two, a while ago, which I thought had some meaning in it.

FANNY : If you want help, I shall be at hand.

[*Exit Fanny.*]

[*Enter Sir William.*]

SIR WILLIAM : The writings are ready, and nothing now is wanted but my old friend's presence. I could

wish the girls had been a little better bred. But this town will polish them. Sure they are come back by this. Ha, who have we here, one of the maids? I've a good mind to try if I can engage her to keep my house in the country. I shan't give her much work.

HARRIET (*aside*): More than she'll undertake, I believe, as little as 'tis.

SIR WILLIAM: Oh! she sees me. Your servant, Mrs. Jenny.

HARRIET: Your honour's servant to command.

SIR WILLIAM: Why, you look as fresh as a rose, Mrs. Jenny. Those lips are not deadened yet with the town smoke. I must taste their freshness. With your leave—no cherry so plump and sweet. Ah, you little rogue, you. Ah!

HARRIET: O Lord, sir, you make me blush.

SIR WILLIAM: Why, there's a blush now. Ah! you may kiss a town girl a thousand times, and as soon raise the Devil, as a colour in her cheeks. I protest, it is very becoming and pretty. Ah, you baggage!

HARRIET: Nay, fie, sir, I must not hear you.

SIR WILLIAM: Yes, but you must, though. Ah! Well, and when the boys and girls are married, what do you intend to do, you little rogue, you?

HARRIET: Do, sir?

SIR WILLIAM: Ay, do. Why, you won't stay with them, I suppose. They'll live chiefly in Town.

HARRIET: Why not, sir? But I hope to be settled myself at the same time.

SIR WILLIAM: Settled yourself, what d'you mean, child?

HARRIET: Why, sir, I hope to be married too. Their men have courted us, and promised to marry us.

SIR WILLIAM: How, marry you! (*aside*) Rogues, dogs, villains! Here's fine doings!

ACT FOUR, SCENE THREE

HARRIET : Nay, upon my word, 'tis true. Here, Rose.

[*Enter Fanny.*]

Is it not true? Are we not indeed to be married, when our mistresses are?

FANNY : Yes, indeed, sir.

SIR WILLIAM : Yes, indeed, sir!

FANNY : If you will consent. There is nothing but that wanting. We have made a very odd bargain. I'll tell it you.

SIR WILLIAM : A very odd one indeed. Was there ever such impudent scoundrels!

HARRIET : Nay, sir, don't be angry with them. They were drove by necessity to it.

SIR WILLIAM : Necessity! The wenches are stark mad.

HARRIET : Yes, indeed, sir. They would have gone a shorter way to work, but we had grace to resist them, and taken possession without the ceremony of marriage, to which they only consented in case you approved it. If we can't prevail on you, we're quite ruined; for we promised to be theirs on their own terms, if we did not succeed.

SIR WILLIAM : Oh, oh, 'tis well 'tis no worse. But pray what were their terms?

HARRIET : Why, sir, to allow us two hundred a year to spend; and, in case of death, which you know may come soon, or inconstancy, which certainly will, they engage to secure us a hundred a year for life.

SIR WILLIAM : Rogues every way. But, child, how could you believe such idle promises? Where should they get a hundred pounds a year to give away? A couple of poor rogues, that have never been masters of as many shillings.

THE DOUBLE DECEIT

FANNY : O sir, we know who they are. They are not what they seem.

SIR WILLIAM : Do you so ! (*aside*) Were there ever two such impudent scoundrels !

HARRIET : Therefore, dear sir, pray consent.

[*They hang about him.*]

FANNY : Have pity on two innocent virgins, who have been unwarily drawn into agreeing to a thing that will undo them.

SIR WILLIAM : Yes, yes, I will consent. Within there. Mrs. Plyable.

[*Enter Mrs. Plyable.*]

Be pleased, good Mrs. Plyable, to lock up these two wenches, and, on your peril, not let 'em stir out till my good friend comes to Town. They are going headlong to be married.

PLYABLE : Married ! Mercy on me, and to whom ?

SIR WILLIAM : To a couple of idle rogues here in livery.

PLYABLE : Bless my poor wits ; what do I hear ! Oh, dear sir, on my knees, let me thank you for this discovery.

SIR WILLIAM : Heyday ! what, is the old woman mad ?

PLYABLE : No, sir, but I should have been so, if I had not known this in time.

SIR WILLIAM : Quite mad, distracted ! stark wild !

PLYABLE : No, sir, no—why, these are my young ladies, disguised, and the others their maids.

SIR WILLIAM (*pulls off his hat, huzzas and dances about the room*) : Hey, come hither, you little wan-

ACT FOUR, SCENE THREE

ton hussies. Stand fair, let me kiss you till your ears crack.

HARRIET : } Fie, sir, you make us blush.
FANNY : }

SIR WILLIAM : Ah, you baggage, no matter for that.

PLYABLE : Hey toss ! What's to be done now ? I think, and begging your worship's pardon, you are a little touched.

SIR WILLIAM : Why, I can't speak it for joy. Those rogues in livery were my son and nephew.

PLYABLE : I could cry my eyes out for joy. What, and have they fallen in love with one another, without knowing each other ! This is joyful news ! Oh nature, nature !

HARRIET : Come, Mrs. Plyable, will you lock us up ?

SIR WILLIAM : Ah, you rogue, you ! No, no, not now. But I'll tell you what I've a mind to do, disinherit my son, and marry you myself.

HARRIET : O fie, sir, that would not be fair.

SIR WILLIAM : Well, well, you shall have the rogue, since you like him. Though he's an impudent extravagant rogue, for all that.

HARRIET : For my sake excuse him ; and to frighten him a little, tell him you are resolved to break off the intended marriage, and expect from the duty they owe you, they should marry us.

SIR WILLIAM : Marry you ! If the dog makes the least scruple of wedding and bedding you, body o' me—I'll—I'll—do't myself.

HARRIET : No, no, that won't be right, I tell you, once again—but I'll come and keep your house in the country now and then.

SIR WILLIAM : Ah ! Ah ! Adod and so you shall, and your sister madcap there. But where are these graceless rogues ?

THE DOUBLE DECEIT

HARRIET : I believe, they're gone home. They left us as you came in.

SIR WILLIAM : I'll go first, and acquaint 'em with my intentions.

FANNY : No, sir, leave that to us. Do you give your consent only, when we call upon you; for they'll hardly believe us.

SIR WILLIAM : Well, I'll be governed by you. I can come into plots with all my heart, when they tend to fulfil my will.

When children, by consent of parents, plot,
There's always something certain to be got.

ACT FIVE

Bellair discovered on a couch in a nightgown.

BELLAIR : 'sdeath, I'm tired of waiting. This prating coxcomb has belied Violetta, and made a dupe of me. He knew, I suppose, what a credulous jealous fool I was, and had a mind to shew me to myself; or, perhaps, this is a plot contrived by them to secure me here, that without danger of discovery, they may meet elsewhere. Fool every way: even now, at this very instant, I afford 'em mirth perhaps. The figure I make, ridiculous enough I confess, adds to their pleasures, and—Hark, what noise is that! Ha, a rustling of silk! Let me compose myself.

[He lies down.]

Enter Widow.]

WIDOW (*in a low tone*) : So far I'm safe. The other may come and disappoint me. There's no time to be lost. Let me see—I must take him for Mr. Careless. If I should call him Bellair, I should prevent his threats by too quick a discovery. (*in a feigned voice*) Mr. Careless—(*Goes to the couch.*)

BELLAIR : Who's that, Violetta?

WIDOW (*aside*) : For the present—(*to him*) Yes. But where are you, sweet love?

[They grope different ways. The Widow stumbles over the couch.]

BELLAIR : So fond!—Here, my life, this way.

WIDOW : Oh!

BELLAIR : What's the matter? You're not hurt?

THE DOUBLE DECEIT

WIDOW : No, I only stumbled.

BELLAIR : Stay where you are. I know whereabouts it is, and will grope my way to you.

WIDOW : Is it you?

[*They meet and take hands.*]

BELLAIR : If you're not convinced, let this satisfy you. (*Kisses.*) How sweet her kisses are ! I taste no treachery in them. I shall be completely revenged.

WIDOW : What's that you say !

BELLAIR : Nothing, my angel. Words are too faint to express my meaning; let this speak for me. (*Kissing.*)

WIDOW : Nay, fie. If I thought you'd have used me so rudely, I'd not have ventured. I tremble all over. If Mr. Bellair should come and surprise us, I should be ruined.

BELLAIR : Damned jade ! We'll retire into the inner room for better security.

WIDOW : I'm afraid to trust myself there.

BELLAIR : Nay, then I must warm you into courage.

WIDOW : May I then venture?

BELLAIR : Ay, ay, child, the danger's not so great.

WIDOW : What shall I do?

BELLAIR : Come, let me lead you in.

WIDOW : Make fast the outer door. One does not know what may happen.

BELLAIR : Let me first lead you in, and I'll return and make all fast.

[*He leads her to the inner room.*]

Enter Violetta and Lettice.]

VIOLETTA : I thought I heard a noise. All's quiet

ACT FIVE

again. Lettice, wait without; and on the least noise you hear, enter with light. Is the porter without ready on occasion, and well instructed in what he is to say?

LETTICE : Yes, madam. (*Exit.*)

[*Bellair, returning to lock the door, catches Violetta.*]

BELLAIR : What, here again ! Stay within. I'll but shut the door, and return.

VIOLETTA : Ha, stay within—shut the door—Heavens, where am I ? Who are you, sir ?

BELLAIR : A pretty odd question. Pr'ythee go in, and I'll answer all your questions at once.

VIOLETTA : Are you not Mr. Bellair ?

BELLAIR : Mr. Bellair ! What can this mean ? It is another voice too ! 'sdeath, who is it I have within, that knows me by the name of Careless !

VIOLETTA : Am I not Violetta ?

BELLAIR : Ay, 'tis so ; 'tis Violetta's voice.

VIOLETTA : Did not my maid tell you of my intended visit ? Why am I received in the dark thus ! Why bid to go in, as if I had been here before ?

BELLAIR : Devil take me if I comprehend anything of all this.

VIOLETTA : Without there—lights. Why, Lettice !

BELLAIR : So, all will out. She'll find a woman within, and turn the tables upon me. This was a masterpiece.

[*Enter Lettice, with candles, stumbles, and lets 'em fall.*]

VIOLETTA : Heedless slut ! Go fetch others quickly.

THE DOUBLE DECEIT

[*Exit Lettice.*]

BELLAIR : Ha, that's lucky. If I can get the unknown woman out before Lettice returns with lights, I still am safe. This way I think it is.—
(*Going to the closet catches Violetta.*) Ha, is't you?
VIOLETTA (*in feigned voice*) : Yes. I'll see what he would be at.

BELLAIR : Whoever you are, let me beseech you to retire before the lights come.

VIOLETTA : He does not know her; that's some comfort.

BELLAIR : Let me lead you out, and your honour's safe; for the Devil take me if I know you.

[*Instead of leading her to the door, he leads her to the closet where the Widow is, and as he returns, meets Lettice with lights.*]

Enter Lettice.]

LETTICE : Bless me, sir, where is my lady !

BELLAIR : Hell and the Devil ! I've led her into the wrong place. Fortune owed me a spite, and has paid me principal and interest.—Now it comes upon me.

[*Noise within.*]

Enter Widow, pulling in Violetta.]

The Widow ! Damnation ! What an escape !

WIDOW : He looks sorrowful. I see he's concerned as well as me.

VIOLETTA : Give you joy, Mr. Bellair, this is an

ACT FIVE

acquisition indeed! Forgive your inconstancy to me; she that has, deserves your love. Come, Lettice, let's be gone. 'Tis pity to interrupt such happy lovers.

BELLAIR : Cruel Violetta, can you suspect me?

WIDOW : I could tear her eyes out, for disappointing me. So forward! Let me tell you, madam, I'll have no such doings in my house. I knew of your intrigue, and hid myself to prevent it. I desire, Mr. Bellair, you'll meet your—somewhere else, or leave my house.

BELLAIR : Peace, hag, and leave the room. Utter a word more against this lady's honour, and I'll not only expose you to everybody in your own house, but to the whole Town. (*aside to her*) Don't I know how ready you were?

WIDOW : He has me in his power, and I must obey. I'm more vexed at the disappointment than anything else.—Madam, I beg your pardon; I was misinformed about you, and hope you will excuse the rudeness of my speech. I take my leave.

[*Exit.*]

BELLAIR : Madam, whatever you may think of what you have seen, if you but will give me a hearing, I don't doubt but I can explain it to your satisfaction.

VIOLETTA : Explain it, Mr. Bellair! I assure you, sir, I think it wants it not. 'Tis very plain, and of a piece with your whole behaviour of late.

BELLAIR : Come, come, madam, this is too much. You saw the person whom you accuse me of preferring to you; and, I'm sure, seriously you can neither wrong my taste, or your own charm so much as to believe it.

THE DOUBLE DECEIT

VIOLETTA : Perhaps, she came in as unexpectedly as I did, and some other was—

BELLAIR : That is supposing a circumstance purposely to find me in the wrong.

VIOLETTA : Not so improbable as you would make it be. Your dress, the darkness of the room, the words you said to me in the dark, mistaking me for the other person, these are circumstances that are not supposed, but real, and imply a person expected, which could not be me. For however changed Mr. Bellair may be, he dares not suppose any conduct of mine could authorize him to give me a reception of this kind.

BELLAIR : How triumphantly she carries it! Mr. Bellair, indeed, has no reason to imagine such a reception from him would be agreeable to Violetta; but all men are not so scrupulous as he.

VIOLETTA : This insolence is beyond all bearing. I advise you to be jealous now.

BELLAIR : You can bear a great deal more from Mr. Careless.

VIOLETTA : Mr. Careless!

BELLAIR : 'sdeath, madam, can you deny your knowing Mr. Careless; the plot contrived by him and you, to get me away; the mock fight; my retreat, and his too happy victory?

VIOLETTA : Can you deny your meeting my maid, her undeceiving you in all these particulars, her acquainting you with my concern for your too hasty retreat, and my impatience,—fool to have shown it!—to see you?

BELLAIR : You should have added too, my having learnt from Mr. Careless since, that what Lettice told me, was a plot contrived by him and you, and that the visit was intended to him, not me; else why should I be in his apartment, dressed in his clothes?

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'sdeath, madam, is it not by his privity, that I am here, in expectation of you? Did I not see your maid this morning going to his apartment? But she'll tell me again it was through mistake.

LETTICE : Yes, indeed, sir, it was.

VIOLETTA : Peace, Lettice, I dare the utmost of his malice. Your extravagant and unreasonable jealousies had already armed me with coolness and distaste for your love; which, had it been generous and pure, would have made me happy : but as it was, would, I foresaw, have distracted me. But now you boldly and insolently dare question my honour, on the bare assertion of a vain fop, that may have misconstrued common civility into a favour, I shall add contempt and hatred to it.

BELLAIR : Say rather your love for Mr. Careless makes you add contempt and hatred to everyone else.

VIOLETTA : Hold, sir, though I owe you no justification, that basely can believe so vile a thing of me, yet I owe it to myself. Prepare, therefore, to be covered with confusion, when you shall be convinced of my innocence.

BELLAIR : Oh, Violetta ! that thought awakes all my tenderness. Were that but once cleared up, worlds should not purchase thy love from me.

VIOLETTA : Presumptuous man ! Do you think me then so mean-spirited as to forgive this world of insults, this base accusation, so easily believed by you, and so daringly avowed to me? (*Walks about angrily.*)

BELLAIR : Her passion seems too natural to be counterfeit. But whom can't a woman deceive, when she has a mind to dissemble?

VIOLETTA : Where is this wondrous youth, that with a word, unsupported too by any proof, can

destroy the reputation of a lady, whom no tongue but his durst ever blast; and whom even Bellair could scarcely charm?

BELLAIR : Ha, what do I hear ! Even in her anger she shows she loves me—Stay, madam, I am ashamed of my unjust suspicions, and believe Mr. Careless is a villain, and dearly shall he pay for it. Yet think not I could credit the least against you, had he not told me such things that it is impossible he could invent or know without the closest intimacy.

VIOLETTA : That, indeed, is very true.

BELLAIR : Believe me, madam, the things he told me would have staggered one less jealous than myself. Impute then to love, what is a crime of love. I only beg forgiveness, and that I may be allowed to bring this rascal before you, to make atonement to you for the wrong he has done you. After which I shall take care to chastise his insolence as it deserves.

VIOLETTA : As to Mr. Careless, sir, I know him not; and leave him therefore to be used by you, as you shall judge fit. What concerns me most—

BELLAIR : Not know him, madam !

VIOLETTA : No, sir, nor ever heard of him, till Lettice first, and now you, speak of him. But what concerns as well as surprises me most, is to find, at the time you accuse me of breach of faith, so many strong circumstances of guilt on your side.

BELLAIR : Those circumstances, madam, can easily be cleared up. 'Twas by Mr. Careless's appointment all. He went out on purpose, and left me here to receive you in his place, where he told me, you would not fail to come. My landlady, I suppose, overheard our discourse, and came in before you. But why you came here is still a mystery to me.

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Mrs. Lettice knew this apartment, and could not be mistaken twice in the same day.

VIOLETTA (*aside*): I never thought of that. How to come off I don't know.

BELLAIR: What must I think of your silence?

VIOLETTA (*angrily*): E'en what you please. But if you will think as I do, think that I disdain to satisfy one that dares suspect me.

BELLAIR: Is there then nothing to be allowed to jealousy?

VIOLETTA: Yes, when your jealousies reach no farther than to quarrel with a look, a smile, or a word lightly bestowed. The making up of such little breaches have a charm in their difficulty; but when your gross suspicions come so near as to affect our honour, she deserves the accusation, that condescends to clear herself.

BELLAIR: Stay, madam, I would not be jealous, nor yet secure, without a cause. Allow me but to bring Mr. Careless before you, and if you don't approve, I'm sure you'll forgive my jealousy.

[*Violetta winks at Lettice, who goes out.*]

VIOLETTA: That's more than I know. However, sir, I'll not deny you that satisfaction.

[*Enter Lettice.*]

LETTICE: Sir, Mr. Careless has sent a porter to acquaint you he cannot wait upon you so soon as he expected, and begs you'd excuse him.

BELLAIR: Is the fellow without?

LETTICE: Yes, sir.

BELLAIR: Bid him wait till I come. Now, madam,

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you shall soon be satisfied : I'll bring him to you in an instant. May I hope to find you here at my return?

[*Exit.*]

VIOLETTA : I shall not go from my word. Lettice !
LETTICE : Madam.

VIOLETTA : What think you now?

LETTICE : What I ever did. That it is in the power of a woman to make a fool of the wisest man. But there is one advantage you'll reap from it, which you don't think of.

VIOLETTA : What's that?

LETTICE : Why, madam, if you should ever, as one does not know what may happen, give him cause to be jealous, he never will, after so gross an imposition. And, let me tell you, madam, a circumstance like this is no disagreeable thing in a married life.

VIOLETTA : It will be of no service to me. For when I cease to love Mr. Bellair—

LETTICE (*whining*) : May I cease to live ! But to cut short this whining declaration, what else is to be done ? Do we once more put on our masculine habits, till some accidental discovery makes us known, or wait his return here as we are ?

VIOLETTA : The porter, whom he'll follow to the Inn, will lead him into the means of discovery, by the questions he will make on finding no Mr. Careless there, which will be enough when he returns here. In the meantime, I'll go in and make myself known to my cousins.

[*Exeunt Violetta and Lettice.*]

ACT FIVE

Enter Young Courtlove and Gaylife.]

COURTLOVE : These wenches run strangely in my thoughts. Such beauty, and so much sense, have found a way even here.

GAYLIFE : 'sdeath, you talk as if you really intended to marry them !

COURTLOVE : I believe I may, on the terms agreed to. Ha, here they are. They smile. Sure they have not prevailed.

GAYLIFE : Ridiculous notion !

[Enter Harriet and Fanny.]

HARRIET : Well, gentlemen, we're come to summon you on your words.

COURTLOVE : Do you remember well the conditions, child ?

HARRIET : Perfectly well. You engage to marry us, if we get Sir William's consent, on failure of which, we are to be yours without the ceremony of a priest.

GAYLIFE : Well summed up. And you are come according to the tenor of the above cited agreement, to put yourselves in our hands ? Why, that's honestly done ; and to shew you, you have to do with men of honour, we'll not take possession, till—

FANNY : The ceremony of a priest be over.

COURTLOVE : A priest, child ! Are you in your right senses ?

FANNY : I think so. My pulse beats very regular and even.

COURTLOVE : A very confident girl for her age. You would then intimate as if you had prevailed on my father to consent.

HARRIET : Even so, sir.

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GAYLIFE : And by what magic art have you compassed this wonderful event?

FANNY : By none, I assure you, sir. A little plain matter of fact opened both his eyes and his heart. In short, sir, he had pity on our youth and innocence, and would not let us fall victims to a bargain we had been unwarily drawn in to make.

COURTLOVE : My father's compassion, in such cases, is indeed very great. Come, come, child, I see you have a mind to be a little knavish, and deceive us; here I take possession, and shall not relinquish my right.

GAYLIFE : Nor I mine, till you bring the discharge in the shape of an order from the old gentleman.

HARRIET : Won't his word do as well?

GAYLIFE : Oh, every whit as well.

HARRIET : See where he comes to give it.

COURTLOVE (*to Gaylife*) : The assurance of the girls is very great. I wonder how far they'll push it.

GAYLIFE : It has run its full length; and here comes the fates, in the shape of your father, to cut the thread.

[*Enter Sir William. Young Courtlove and Gaylife go up to him.*]

SIR WILLIAM : Oh, your servant, gentlemen. Are not you a couple of very impudent rogues, to drive such bargains? Two hundred pounds a year for your private recreations only! Why, you unconscionable whoresons, what do you expect for your necessary wants, if your superfluous ones require so much?

COURTLOVE : You can't think us in earnest, sir.

SIR WILLIAM : But indeed, sir, I can. And to punish

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you for being so, I here enjoin you, on your respective duties to me, as father to one, and guardian to the other, to marry these girls.

HARRIET (*to Courtlove*): I hope you'll take my word another time.

FANNY (*to Gaylife*): Are you still an infidel?

SIR WILLIAM: Nay, never stare. If you don't marry them before you stir from hence, I'll disinherit you, and marry one myself; nay, both, rather than not punish two such extravagant rogues.

COURTLOVE: Sir, I can't think you speak seriously.

SIR WILLIAM: Here's an impudent dog for you; he won't take his father's word. And pray, sir, what's your opinion of this matter? You don't think I'm serious neither, I suppose.

GAYLIFE: No, indeed, sir, I have a better opinion of you, than to believe any such thing.

SIR WILLIAM: Cry you mercy, sir, I am very much beholden to you for your good opinion of me. But notwithstanding this good opinion you are pleased to have—(*Gaylife bows.*) No ceremony, I beseech you, sir; and in spite of your infidelity, I've a strong notion I shall see you two married before I'm two hours older to these pretty young virgins.

COURTLOVE: Sir, I never disobeyed you before, and was in hopes I never should have had any occasion to do it: but if you can so far forget the honour of your family as to marry your son to a chambermaid, for you seem to be angry at my not thinking you in earnest, you must excuse me, sir, if I choose rather to incur your displeasure, than disgrace myself, and you, by a match so much beneath me.

SIR WILLIAM: I hitherto thought, my prudent sir, that a father was the best judge what match was proper for his son. But I find I must learn that from you.

COURTLOVE : Sir, I perceive, you're angry.

SIR WILLIAM : A very clear-sighted son this ! Perceive ! why you may very well perceive it ; for there is nothing more plain. What odd notions of honour the young fellows of this age have ! What a mixture of pride and knavery ! Here's a fine gentleman for you ! He won't disgrace his family by marrying a modest young girl, because she's beneath him, though she has all the merit her sex can pretend to : but this very same fine gentleman thinks it no disgrace to himself, no shame to violate those principles of honour which alone constitute the fine gentleman, by corrupting that chastity he ought to protect wherever he meets it—(*aside*) I'm not sorry the rogue has so much regard for his family though.

COURTLOVE : Sir, you carry that matter too far. Give me leave, sir, to make one distinction here.

SIR WILLIAM : Sir, I'll hear none of your distinctions. Either consent to marry this—which of you is it lays claim to him?—I shall burst with laughing.

HARRIET : His offer, sir, was made to me.

SIR WILLIAM : Then, sir, do you either consent to marry this pretty young virgin ; and you, sir, this other, within an hour, or—

HARRIET : Good Sir William, don't be so violent. Leave them to us.

GAYLIFE : Ay, ay, do pray, sir, leave us together ; we shall settle matters better without you. You see, sir, 'tis their own request.

SIR WILLIAM : Well, I will leave you together ; but it shall be only till the parson and lawyer come.—How shamed the rogues will be, when they come to know the truth ; though I question if there's any shame at all in any of the young fellows of the age.

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GAYLIFE (*to Sir William*): Sir, will you be so good as to—

SIR WILLIAM: Why, how now, sirrah, you have not the impudence to turn me out sure?

GAYLIFE: No, sir. But you see 'tis their desire; they have carried the jest as far as 'twill go; they have a mind to bring matters to a conclusion, but dare not speak before you.

SIR WILLIAM: I shall never bear it. Well, I'll go. But, d'you hear? Come to a resolution before I return; for I shall bring two decisive gentlemen with me, and I'll have no debating then.—Mad wenches!

[*Exit laughing.*]

COURTLOVE (*to Harriet*): Come, child, I'll have no more trifling. My father, whatever you may think, is not serious.

HARRIET: Then, sir, let us be so. Have you any dislike to my person?

COURTLOVE: Dislike! 'sdeath, I never saw anything so beautiful in my life!

FANNY: Have you, sir, any to mine?

GAYLIFE: I wish you'd put me to the trial how much I like it.

HARRIET: My temper and understanding?

COURTLOVE: Both excellent.

FANNY: Sir—

GAYLIFE: How all women love to hear their own praises!—when the person pleases, I seldom quarrel with anything else.

HARRIET: Sir, I hope, notwithstanding your wild way of thinking, you believe we offer you a pair of virgin hearts.

COURTLOVE: As to that, child, every man that mar-

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ries is in the same case with us. That must always be taken upon trust.

GAYLIFE (*to Fanny*): Why don't you ask my sentiment about that?

FANNY: Your friend has answered that so fully, that 'tis needless.

HARRIET: Then, sir, seriously, what objection have you to the match?

COURTLOVE: Hold, child, don't go so fast. Let me ask you one question—suppose we were really what we appear, footmen, and you of birth and fortune. Suppose we had catechized you in the same manner you have us, and received the same answers; what would you say to the last question you put us?

HARRIET: I perceive the drift of your question. But I shall speak my real sentiments. To be frank then, I don't know how far love might carry me; but I should condemn myself if I stooped so low.

[*Enter Mrs. Plyable.*]

PLYABLE: Miss Harriet, Miss Fanny.

COURTLOVE: Miss Harriet, Miss Fanny! Pr'ythee, old gentlewoman, who are you talking to?

HARRIET (*to Fanny*): All will out now.

PLYABLE: As if you did not know.

GAYLIFE: Devil take me if I do.

PLYABLE: Come, come, 'tis time to throw off the masks.

COURTLOVE: Why, are these your mistresses?

PLYABLE: Could not you see that, through their disguises?

GAYLIFE: We have made a sweet piece of work on't. We have been driving a pretty bargain. How

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shall we look 'em in the face! 'sdeath, I never was ashamed before.

HARRIET: Come, gentlemen, don't puzzle your brains for an apology. My own sentence acquits you; and I will go so far as to say, if you had taken us on supposition of being really what we appeared, I should not have liked you so well.

COURTLOVE: Ladies, if we have said anything that was unfit for you to hear, impute it to our ignorance, and not to any want of respect.

GAYLIFE: If we had seen you, there had been no necessity for us to put on these disguises. Your pardon now, ladies, and permission to serve you, would be an honour we could only hope for from your good nature.

FANNY: Our fathers have carried matters too far for us to affect nicety and reservedness.

HARRIET (*smiling*): You see, sir, we could not well accept your offers; but I can easily forgive you. The old gentleman was before-hand with you, and had made some distant overtures. It runs in the blood!

COURTLOVE: My father!

HARRIET: Nay, 'twas no great matter. He only wanted a house-keeper, and would have provided for me. Both father and son would have taken care of me, I find.

PLYABLE: Will you let me put in a word now? I have waited long enough. Your cousin Violetta is in the house, and desires to see you.

HARRIET: My cousin Violetta?

PLYABLE: Yes, your cousin Violetta. Do you think you are the only mad ones in the family? She has been here these two days, disguised in men's clothes.

HARRIET: My cousin Violetta in men's clothes!

How many disguises love makes us put on! Gentlemen, you'll excuse us a while. A young lady, a relation, and friend—

COURTLOVE: No apology, ladies. If we can contribute in anything to your friend's happiness, you may command us. We shall wait within.

[Exeunt ladies.]

Well, friend, how d'you like the prospect of your prison, now you have so near a view of it?

GAYLIFE: Faith, it looks smiling.

COURTLOVE: Smiling! What a cold term! It looks enchanting. Life seems too short to taste all the different beauties it offers to my imagination. Ha, what have we here? My father holding his sides with laughing.

[They stand aside.]

Enter Sir William.]

SIR WILLIAM: Oh, for a little touch of—misfortune, to take me down to a level with other men! I neither can nor will bear it any longer. Ha, ha! I would not give up my share of pleasure, when the discovery will be made, for a hundred guineas. My blessing, and their masters' pardon! Ha, ha! I can answer for both, I believe. Ha, ha! Oh! Gentlemen, are you there? Well, are you come to a resolution yet?

COURTLOVE: Yes, sir, if you'll promise one thing.

SIR WILLIAM: What's that, sir?

COURTLOVE: Only, sir, not to make a cuckold of me.

ACT FIVE

GAYLIFE : Here's a father for you! A just and equitable parent, that will disinherit his son, because, like a generous young fellow, he offers two hundred a year, to purchase what his father, like a covetous old hunk, would have bought for the twentieth part of that sum.

SIR WILLIAM : What, has she babbled, squeaked! Young gipsy! Well, I forgive her—She's a delicate morsel, is she not, sirrah?

COURTLOVE : Sir, she has all that can make me happy.

SIR WILLIAM : Why, that's well said; and I am overjoyed thou think'st so. Gaylife, how dost thou like thy lot?

GAYLIFE : More than I've words to express.

SIR WILLIAM : Don't say, so, don't say so. Dislike her, you dog, and mortify me a little. Do, pr'ythee : things go too well. But, where are the young hus-sies I left with you?

GAYLIFE : Their governess fetched 'em to a young lady, a relation, that has lodged here in men's clothes.

SIR WILLIAM : What, more plots! More disguises! I shall never be able to bear it, if it goes right, as I hope it will, for the sake of my young madcap.

COURTLOVE : Sir, if you please, we'll go in, and see how it goes.

SIR WILLIAM : With all my heart.—By that time the bridegrooms and brides will have had their expectations raised high enough to feel a mortification.

[*Exeunt.*

Harriet, Fanny, Violetta, Lettice, and Mrs. Plyable discovered.]

THE DOUBLE DECEIT

HARRIET : Nay, never be so faint-hearted now !
What, afraid of your victory !

VIOLETTA : Excuse my fears, dear Harriet, I have
engaged too far ; played too deep. I know not what
he may think of so impudent a step.

FANNY : Think ! Why, that you have loved him
beyond the bounds of discretion ; and that, I'm sure,
ought not to be a crime with him.

VIOLETTA : My fears lie not so much that way. I
blush to think in what dress he has seen me.

LETTICE : Oh, as to that, madam, give me leave to
tell you, that, in my poor opinion, you have lost
nothing by that.

VIOLETTA : Peace, trifier.

HARRIET : Here comes Sir William.

[*Enter Sir William, Young Courtlove, and Gaylife.*]

SIR WILLIAM : So, my little madcaps ! This is the
lady, I suppose ; well ! and how go matters ? All
right, snug ! Has he found her out ?

COURTLOVE : You had better ask him, sir ; for I
think I see him coming.

SIR WILLIAM : Adod, and so I will. Stand aside a
little.

[*Exeunt omnes, praeter Sir William.*]

Enter Bellair.]

BELLAIR : The people of the Inn have told me en-
ough to confirm my suspicions. What a senseless
creature was I, not to perceive it sooner ! And how
unjust to believe such a story of Violetta ! Now I
recollect, every feature of Careless and his man
resemble those of Violetta and Lettice.

ACT FIVE

[*Sir William comes forward.*]

Your pardon; but I was told below there was a young lady here, that—

SIR WILLIAM : Well, sir, and what's your business with that lady?

BELLAIR : When I know what right you have to question me, I may answer.

SIR WILLIAM : Do you love her?

BELLAIR : What the devil does the old fellow mean? You're merry, sir.

SIR WILLIAM : So I am, sir. I should be very much obliged to you, or any honest gentleman, that would mortify me a little; for I am so well pleased, that it is a pain to me.

BELLAIR : Then you've no need of being mortified. But, sir, if you know anything of the lady, will you be so good as to tell me where she is? If you don't, I must take the liberty to seek her myself.

SIR WILLIAM : Look'ee, sir, if you love her, I believe I can help you to a sight of her.

BELLAIR : 'sdeath, sir, your mirth grows troublesome; I have other thoughts in my head at present.

SIR WILLIAM : Have you so, sir! then I'll drive 'em out as fast as I can. Come forth, madam, answer for yourself.

[*Violetta and the rest come forward.*]

BELLAIR (*to Violetta*) : I blush, and am confounded, to appear before you.

SIR WILLIAM : That's a good sign. My rogues there had not so much modesty.

BELLAIR : The story I credited so lightly against your honour, leaves me without any hope of pardon : as I can never forgive myself, so I can never

expect to be forgiven. The only reparation I can make, is to acknowledge my crime, and submit myself to what punishment you shall please to inflict.

VIOLETTA : Those that feel themselves guilty, though their crimes may be different, are always favourable in their sentence; though, perhaps, Mr. Bellair may think mine severe.

SIR WILLIAM : Come, come, I'll save you your blushes, and him his speeches. Here, give me your hands, both of you; and now punish one another for the rest of your lives. I know that's what you'd be an hour bringing out.

VIOLETTA (*to Harriet*) : Your father, dear Harriet, is the most convenient man I know.

SIR WILLIAM (*to Bellair*) : I hope, sir, my mirth is not troublesome now?

BELLAIR : So far from it, that I shall owe the happiness of my life to you, if this lady can forget my unjust suspicions, and will confirm your sentence.

VIOLETTA : Mr. Bellair, it would be ridiculous in me to affect indifference now, or say I don't love you : I never knew but one fault in you, and that was jealousy : that fault removed, my hand and heart would go together.

BELLAIR : On these terms, madam, I venture to take 'em now.

VIOLETTA : 'Tis too late to refuse.

COURTLOVE : Though a stranger to Mr. Bellair, I beg leave to wish him all the happiness his present state seems to promise.

BELLAIR : I thank you, friend—a very familiar footman ! I presume, sir, he's yours?

SIR WILLIAM : My son, sir : the frolic is gone round, as you may see.

VIOLETTA : I am not the only one, Mr. Bellair, whom love has disguised this day : these are per-

ACT FIVE

sons whom you must call cousins; their story you shall know at leisure.

BELLAIR : In the meantime I beg leave to be numbered among their friends.

SIR WILLIAM : Oh, here come the honest pair of servants ! Now prepare yourselves.

COURTLOVE : For what ?

SIR WILLIAM : You shall see.

[*Enter Jerry, Frank, Rose, Jenny. They kneel to Sir William.*]

JERRY, FRANK, }
ROSE, JENNY : } Your blessing, sir, and pardon.

SIR WILLIAM : Ay, heaven bless you all together ! You stole a match indeed, but I forgive you !

COURTLOVE : What ! married ! How we had been served if it had been in their power !

JERRY : }
FRANK : } We are bound to pray for you.

[*Jerry and Frank go up to Young Courtlove and Gaylife; Rose and Jenny to their ladies.*]

FRANK : }
JERRY : } Sir—
ROSE : }
JENNY : } Madam—

[*They stop on seeing each other go up.*]

JERRY (*to Frank*) : What the devil's the meaning of this ?

ROSE : I don't understand this !

[*They offer to go, as before, and stop.*]

THE DOUBLE DECEIT

FRANK (*to Jerry*): I'm damnably frightened.

JENNY: I doubt we've made a mistake!

[*They offer again to go, and stop.*]

JERRY: Pray, my dear, what are you going to do?

JENNY: I was just upon asking you the same question, my love.

FRANK: Have you any business there, sweet?

ROSE: Not much, duck.

JERRY (*to Frank*): We're in the wrong box.

ROSE (*to Jenny*): We're caught in our own trap.

FRANK (*to Jerry*): These fine minxes are the maids.

JENNY (*to Rose*): These dressed-up rogues are the footmen.

JERRY (*to Frank*): I'm not surprised at their consenting so readily to the match.

ROSE (*to Jenny*): The deuce take their proposal of marriage.

SIR WILLIAM: Why, how now! What's the matter, gentlemen and ladies? On the stool of repentance already!

JERRY: Don't triumph, worthy sir; pray, my dear, who are you? For I am much afraid you are not the person I took you for.

JENNY: Let me be who I will, I believe I'm too good for you.

FRANK: The first proof, my dearest, that I require of your obedience, is, that you'd tell me what you really are?

ROSE: Your equal, I believe, my dear, every way.

FRANK: Yes, we are well matched, with a vengeance!

JENNY: Pray, sir, who did you take me for?

JERRY: Miss Harriet Richly, with thirty thousand pounds to see off your charms.

ACT FIVE

HARRIET : Then, sir, I must thank you; for the favour I find was designed for me.

JERRY : Indeed, madam, it was. But my cursed stars! But, my love, you are mistaken too; for it runs strangely in my head, that you expect to find in me Sir William's son and heir, my young master.

JENNY : To own the truth, he was my mark; but I see I missed my aim.

COURTLOVE : I'm not the less obliged to you both.

FRANK : I'll make no questions.

ROSE : Nor I.

JERRY : I guess the sense of my brother in iniquity, and of our fellow sufferers.

[Jerry, Frank, Rose and Jenny kneel.]

Gentlemen and ladies, we acknowledge ourselves unworthy of pardon: we thought to get out of servitude and poverty, 'tis true, by unjust means, and we are punished for life with both.

SIR WILLIAM : Well, since you take the stroke with so much meekness and humility, and are sufficiently punished for your roguery on both sides, I don't much care if I do feel a little compassion for you. Here, sirrah, in this purse is the remainder of the hundred guineas. Take 'em, they'll help you to fall into some way of business—no thanks, you dogs. I know you don't deserve them, nor your precious brides neither.

COURTLOVE : Well, since my father can so generously resent your vile behaviour to his family, we'll think of some way to provide for you, in such a manner, that you may neither be a mutual plague to each other, nor be induced to commit some other piece of villainy.

THE DOUBLE DECEIT

JERRY : } We humbly thank your honours.
FRANK : }

SIR WILLIAM : And now, since matters are so happily concluded, what say you to a dance? I fancy, I could foot it still with a tight lass.

[*The young ladies advance.*]

No, no, I'll have neither of you; you refused me once; besides, you're provided for. Mrs. Lettice is the only disengaged one here. What say you, can you make a shift with an old fellow for once?

[*Lettice curtsies, and gives her hand.*]

Come, strike up, fiddlers.

[*A dance.*]

COURTLOVE : Well, ladies, to confess the truth, my friend and I sat out in a wrong chase, mistaking our game, and the manner of pursuing it. You've set us right; and to you we now owe the avoiding that misnamed path of happiness, called gallantry.

Like us, the sprightly rake, at first sets out,
And in love's garden, joyous, roves about :
Crops every flower, that's pleasing to the eye,
And thinks his wanton taste will never die :
Convinced, at length, no more he loves to roam,
But finds his lasting happiness at home.

EPILOGUE

by the AUTHOR

Tho' wit, like air, to ev'ry clime is common,
And pleases, universally, like woman;
Tho', where a foreign star affords a gleam,
'Tis no disgrace to catch the friendly beam—
Yet of all bards, commend me to th' inventive!
For genius ever was its own incentive.
To call in second aid, is plain—confessing
A puny strength, too weak to give due blessing!
Thus wither'd dotards, conscious of their failings,
Connive at spouses curing their own ailings.

Our bard, too humble to pretend to merit,
Is yet too proud, with foreigners, to share it—
By his own vigour prompt, he'll stand, or fall;
Ah, ladies! What a man! if he has—pleas'd ye all!
Besides, translators now are grown so plenty,
The Town with ease might spare nineteen in
twenty:
Faith banish them—and to your best alliance,
Take the bold youth—that throws them—brave
defiance
That, warm'd with native fire, treats French trans-
lation,
As Britons should—with British indignation.

What forms a genius, or inspires a heart?
To feel with truth, and to express with art:
And shall translated scenes alone, this pow'r im-
part?
Shall our now barren theatre become
An empty magazine—a mere store room,
For wit, that once grew best, and flourish'd most
at home?
Ladies, in you alone it now remains

THE DOUBLE DECEIT

To clear the British stage from foreign stains—
To cherish bards, whom your bright pictures warm,
And who, from copying you, take pow'r to charm.
Distinguish'd thus, on ours, your smiles bestow,
And, by encouragement, tho' partial, shew,
(What should inflame a gen'rous bosom most)
His very aim, to please you, was not lost.

JACKIE THE
JUMPER

by

GWYN THOMAS

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The English Stage Company and Robin Fox with Greville Poke presented *Jackie the Jumper* at the Royal Court Theatre, London, on February 1, 1963, with the following cast :

MIRIAM MORGAN	<i>Jeanne Le Bars</i>
JIM JAMES	<i>Graham Curnow</i>
IESTYN BEST	<i>Vernon Morris</i>
GEORGE CHISLETT	<i>David Garfield</i>
JANET	<i>Anne Edwards</i>
JACKIE REES	<i>Ronald Lewis</i>
REVEREND RICHIE REES	<i>Dudley Jones</i>
1ST CROW	<i>Talfryn Thomas</i>
2ND CROW	<i>Raymond Llewellyn</i>
AARON MEAD	<i>John Gill</i>
MR. LUXTON	<i>Michael Gough</i>
COLONEL OF MILITIA	<i>William McAllister</i>
COUNTY SHERIFF	<i>Graham Crowden</i>
MONA LUXTON	<i>Meg Wynn Owen</i>
EIRLYS LUXTON	<i>Branwen Iorwerth</i>
ARIANWEN LUXTON	<i>Sian Davies</i>
SOLDIERS	<i>Arthur Parry, Peter Forest</i>
VILLAGE GIRLS	<i>Anne Lakeman, Maureen Morelle, Gaynor Rees, Judith Lloyd Thomas</i>
FOUNDRY WORKERS	<i>Frank Davies, Peter Forest, Raymond Llewellyn, Bernard Martin, Arthur Parry, Talfryn Thomas</i>

Directed by John Dexter

Design by Michael Annals

Music composed and arranged by Alun Hoddinott

Musical Director : John McCarthy

Harp : Elisabeth Coates

Trumpet : Cliff Haines

Flute and Piccolo : Norman Knight

Percussion : Martin Aston

CHARACTERS

MIRIAM MORGAN

JIM JAMES

IESTYN BEST

GEORGE CHISLETT

JANET

JACKIE REES

REVEREND RICHIE REES

1ST CROW

2ND CROW

AARON MEAD

MR. LUXTON

COLONEL OF MILITIA

COUNTY SHERIFF

MONA LUXTON

EIRLYS LUXTON

ARIANWEN LUXTON

SOLDIERS

VILLAGE GIRLS

FOUNDRY WORKERS

AFTER THE CHIP-SHOP

After years of writing rather quiet philosophic novels featuring no weapon deadlier than the blunter type of chip-shop fork, I had a fancy to write something gusty and rollicking, festooned with swords, horses, gibbets and mayhem in all its stock sizes. In Jackie the Jumper I've broadened the social scope of my fiction. My pre-occupation with proletarian characters is no longer so acute. I've pulled in people from the top levels of the bourgeoisie. The chip-shop is way, way behind.

The transition was a natural one. A life-long addiction to grand opera made it inevitable that one day I would move away from my wry chronicles of the brighter among our under-privileged. In a social ambience so emphatically tainted with lunacy as that of a mining area moving into dereliction, I took even the dottiest libretto in my stride. The plots of the early and middle Verdi in which probability stands in the centre of the stage, bow-legged and gaping, I accepted as prosaic reality. As a member of the Band of Hope junior operatic group I once played in Trovatore. After years of being harassed into primness and piety by the zealots of the diaconate addressing me in Welsh, a language I did not understand, I found no difficulty in accepting that a vengeful gypsy, whose mother has been burned at the stake by a Duke, should not only wish to burn the Duke's child but actually burned her own child in error. A predilection for violence, ashes and serious mistakes overlay my entire culture.

Years later I was the tutor of a cultural group in an Educational Settlement. We were pursuing a course called "The European Mind", which covered everything from the amoeba to the burning

tip at Dinas, Rhondda, a well-known local nuisance except to the chillier type of voter who wanted to be set alight by the floating embers. One evening we got on to the subject of Verdi's Force of Destiny, an opera in which coincidences go off like cosmic gongs. I gave the group an analysis of this work so excessively cogent it still has some of them confused. It is an epic of revenge, and seeing the world at that time as a pretty malignant parish, I had cordial feelings about revenge and I could treat with Don Alvaro and the sons of the Marquis of Calatrava as rationally as if they were fellow lodge-members. As for the heroine, Leonora, living as a hermit in that solitary grotto in the high sierra, I knew dozens of female neighbours who, psychologically, were doing just that.

At about just the same period I did service as an unpaid stage manager to a company that was frightening the wits out of audiences in the local Welfare Hall with performances of such works as The Dumb Man from Manchester and The Crimes of Stephen Hawkes (Hawkes was a man who had the strength to break people's backs as others do matches and he used it.) And of course, Sweeney Todd. Besides stage management and seeing that the barber's chair really tilted clients into the pie-shop, I also appeared as a passing stranger who leers through the window, a kind of omen of the doom that was surely on the way. The producer was a sucker for omens and he kept me pretty busy, passing and leering. He even had me enlarge the window so that the audience could get the full flavour of what, in those days, was a savagely saturnine and disturbing face.

So, with that background, it was inevitable that I should edge my way back to melodrama, but melodrama invested with a kind of verbal dignity and a range of ideas that would have stood Todd,

the demon, on his ear and reaching for the brush to stop my mouth with lather.

When I started casting about for the theme that later became Jackie the Jumper I considered the possibility of a Spanish theme. This was the old early-Verdi-trauma and the baked-gypsy-motif still kicking around for laughs. I gave a thought to the revolt of the "comuneros" in 1520, an incident in which Carlos Quinto suppressed insurrection and did a brisk undertaking job on Spanish democracy for centuries to come, and left the cadaver of a stifled radical on every tree from Cadiz to Segovia.

But my mind came back to the place where it abidingly belongs, South Wales. I wanted a play that would paint the full face of sensuality, rebellion and revivalism. In South Wales these three phenomena have played second fiddle only to the Rugby Union, which is a distillation of all three. I wanted a theme that would illustrate this curious see-saw of passivity and defiance in human life. Why some stir it up and others allow the scum of conformity and defeat to form into a mortal pall above their heads. The urge to exult and couple at odds with the compulsive wish to geld and part. Dionysus beating the living lights out of St. Paul and the other way about.

The valleys where I grew up were the classic arena of this duel. Political turbulence and a fiercely flowering libido singed the minds and the fern-beds of the zone. Time and again one would have the feeling that disgust and love had reached a climactic tumescence that would have life bursting its breeches in no time at all. Often, leaving the chapel after an interminable sermon and six rousing hymns, one would have an ache for carnal relief in some shape or form that would have bleached the deacons' bowlers if they had truly known how perverse are the tides of piety in the minds of the

younger sectaries. Then in answer would come a wave of evangelism, chastening the peccant, fettering the id and spreading caution in all directions. And I, whether the cause was earthly insurrection or heavenly salvation, was always one of the leading banner-bearers. My bardic name was ambivalence.

For the story of Jackie the Jumper, the facts are loosely set in the context of the early Chartist movement. The Merthyr Riots, to be exact. (A South Walian carries his tally of riots around as proudly as a Tahitian would his necklace of shark's teeth.) Involved in them, by the same kind of tricky double-devotions that have been my own plague, is Jackie the Jumper. Facing him is his uncle, Richie "Resurrection" Rees, a thundering divine. And between them the early struggles of a society tormented and besmirched by the eruption of the great iron-furnaces and the descent of the great puritanical vetoes.

Gwyn Thomas

ACT ONE

In the background the reflected glare of great furnaces. A sad, sweet dirge to which the workers dance. Two musical themes commingle here. One, a lament of great plangency, the other a serenade. The two, mounting each other, could give a good picture of grief knocking its stupid old head against hope.

JANET : For how far did we follow him?

GEORGE : Until we grew hungry and the road was as hard as hell beneath our feet.

JANET : For how long did we follow him?

GEORGE : For a lifetime multiplied by as many of us as were there.

JANET : When he bade us follow him no more, did he look back?

GEORGE : Twice.

JANET : Did he wave at us?

GEORGE : Once.

JANET : What was the time of day?

GEORGE : The sun was falling hot and straight upon our heads.

ALL : The Jumper, Jackie the Jumper. Where is he now, the Jumper?

JANET : Where was he leading us?

GEORGE : To a place of calm, clean peace, whatever that means.

JANET : Was there such a place?

GEORGE : We'll never know. Such men have a way of creating a whole new sky of promise. A sky that makes the earth and us look different. Then they vanish.

JANET : What was the very last glimpse you had of him?

GEORGE : He was jumping across the stream that borders the forest.

ACT ONE

ALL : The Jumper, Jackie the Jumper.

[The music makes a leap. Jackie Rees appears at the top of the mound, radiant, smiling. He raises both his arms in a fervent gesture of greeting.]

JANET : Jackie's back !

[Jackie is broad, curly-haired and bright-eyed. The rhythm of the dance becomes swift and joyful. Jackie takes girl after girl into his arms. He stops suddenly and points at the flames.]

JACKIE REES : Oh what a lovely flavour of hell it has.

[The dancers launch into a thumping song.]

CHORUS :

Iron, iron, all new iron,
We make the stuff in molten streams,
No time for love, no time for dreams;
Hours before the masters yawn
We shuffle to the mills through the still of dawn.
Tap the ovens, tap the sky,
We'll work and shrivel until we die;
Let's dance and whirl till we lose the light;
Let the flesh give welcome to the night.
Till every girl and every boy
Steps into the heart of a molten joy.

JACKIE REES : That's it. Let's wipe away this pox of smoke and toil and get back to the laughter that must once have been the King-thing on this earth.

CHORUS :

Till every girl and every boy
Steps into the heart of a molten joy.

JACKIE THE JUMPER

GEORGE CHISLETT: That's it, Jackie. A molten joy. Oh! I wish this day would go on for ever.

JANET: We're glad you came back, Jackie. We missed you. Where've you been?

[Jackie vaguely waves in a direction away from the flames.]

JACKIE REES: Over a lot of mountains, down a lot of valleys, asking people why they were knitting inch-thick shrouds for themselves, giving up the art of loving.

GEORGE CHISLETT: What answers did they give, Jackie?

JACKIE REES: They didn't give any answers. They looked right past me and kept on knitting.

GEORGE CHISLETT: They would. Mad for shrouds since the preachers and the iron hit them. If they don't get you with a hot doctrine, they get you with a hot ingot.

JACKIE REES: And who swings the hottest doctrine?

GROUP: Your uncle, Richie Resurrection Rees.

JACKIE REES: You're right. May his God disquiet him. And who swings the hottest ingot?

GROUP: John Ironhead Luxton.

JACKIE REES: And his iron is hardening over all the land like an old dark vein.

GEORGE CHISLETT: Are they after you still, Jackie?

JACKIE REES: Like hounds. In the last year they've blamed four strikes, one cattle pox, ten deaths and nine rapes on me. I'd need to be a man-sized grasshopper and a shire-stallion to get around the way they say I do.

JANET: Mr. Resurrection Rees preached a tremend-

ACT ONE

ous sermon against you last Sunday. Scorched the woodwork, terrified the women, cured the deacons of the screws and made the windows rattle.

JACKIE REES : He would. I'm the best raw material ! On the sermons he's preached against me he's come to be the Mahomet of the chapels. If he had paid me to be a vagrant and a goat I couldn't have served him better. And my father, his brother, he got such a hell of a time between the two of us he was glad to go.

GEORGE CHISLETT : The furnace door burst and he took it in the face. I saw it. I was there. It was the early morning and Ironhead had been piling on the heat all through the night to meet some special order. From the French or the Russians. Some lot that want a harder grasp on life. It came out like a cork from the bottle, the door. Your father was there, right in front.

JACKIE REES : He was glad to go.

GEORGE CHISLETT : He didn't know if he was glad or no.

JACKIE REES : He was. He had a way of planting himself in front of little explosions and taking the lot. Ironhead and Resurrection need willing victims to keep the iron pure and the species blushing. My old man was one of them. If ever he went to hear a really strong preacher, and he had a knack of knowing where the hell-fire boys would be banging the pulpit, he'd come home with no control over his bowels or his limbs. They'd have him running around like a kid in the dark.

GEORGE CHISLETT : Very good with terror, the hell-fire boys.

JACKIE REES : Then his brother would come around urging him to have me chained, gelded, branded, deported, and God knows what. And with every

JACKIE THE JUMPER

suggestion the old man nodded and said he'd see to it right away. Every time he came shuffling near my bed, I kept my back to the wall and my hands ready and my eyes sharp.

GEORGE CHISLETT : That's a terrible situation in a bedroom, Jackie. Back to the wall, tense and expectant, not knowing what tool your old man has got sharpened for use.

JACKIE REES : He had no luck. The one time he tried to ease his widower's life with a bit of back-lane jobbery he ran into the one woman in Ferncleft who liked to have her passion seamed with violence. She beat him half to death.

JIM JAMES : Uncertainty is all around. You go up a back lane with the best of bad intentions and you tangle with Jem Mace's sister. Have you ever made a mistake like that, Jackie?

JACKIE REES : No, Jim. I don't want to boast, but I know the way. I have good sensitive feet and my throat usually manages to find the right sort of song, the right shape of welcoming door. Nothing explodes in front of me. Nothing has fettered me. Nothing has yet degraded me. And it never will.

GEORGE CHISLETT : They're closing in, Jackie, Resurrection Rees said last week that you'd reached the end of your course. He said you'd seduced your last girl, corrupted your last honest working-man, and insulted your last God.

JANET : Oh! he was in top form. I was glad I'd bought a new shawl to go. When he spoke about the girls his eyes were just like moons and he looked just like you. He's working out a new benediction to make us proof against you.

JIM JAMES : He said you are turning this place into a Sodom and Gomorrah.

JACKIE REES : Where's that?

ACT ONE

JIM JAMES : Two noted centres of laxity in the long ago. Sodom and Gomorrah.

JACKIE REES : They talked about them in the theological college my uncle sent me to. But I always sat in corners where the sound wouldn't penetrate.

JIM JAMES : . . . And he says you'll have us all queueing up for tickets in the next whale. He's asking God never to take his eyes off you.

JACKIE REES : That'll be a comfort in the mountains, in the nights. Oh! well, let's forget Resurrection Rees and Ironhead Luxton and their burning manias. Let's have a few hours of affection before you crawl back to your cottages and your stink-holes. And when the first daylight stirs I'll start walking west to tickle me a trout on the banks of the Teify, and spread a little dismay and curiosity among the pious.

[A thoughtful quietness hits the group. They stare at the leaping furnace lights. The men start whistling a soft counter-melody to some such folk tune as "Aderyn Pur" and they lead their girls on to a kind of grass bank. They lie down in postures of frank passion. The top couple are Jackie and Janet. George Chislett and his friend Miriam Morgan are the bottom couple. Their bodies sink more cosily into the earth and their crooned song touches silence.]

Then there is a black, discordant crash of wind and brass. In comes Richie Resurrection Rees, followed by two attendants, small men with all the stigmata of timid piety upon them. Regardless of context they have their hands half-raised to express horror. Richie Rees is a big, handsome, passionate man, with a voice full of Old Testament bugles, and long

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fingers nailed with anathemas and ready at all times to project accusations. He points at the silent clumps of lovers. He stares at them incredulously and turns to his companions. They hide their faces and their whole expression is that of men who have now seen humanity cover the last yard of its depraved course and are now giving up the ghost.]

REV. RICHIE REES : No !

[His companions shake their heads to back him up but do not try to compete with his voice.]

No ! No !

[There is no stirring from the lovers.]

Locked in carnality in full view of the world. Deaf with it !

COMPANIONS : Their ears are stopped with it.

REV. REES : Lechery is death !

GEORGE CHISLETT : It isn't, you know.

REV. REES : Lust is ruin.

JIM JAMES : Lust is all right.

REV. REES : Stand and be named. Stand and be shamed, physically wanton, morally lamed. Stand and be named.

[The couples are intimidated and one by one they descend the hillock to stand before the evangelist. Only Jackie and Janet remain undisturbed. They give an enormous groan of pleasure that makes Resurrection Rees clench and raise his fists.]

You two, stand and be named.

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JACKIE REES (*without lifting his head*) : My earache is back. (*Raises voice.*) Stop bawling there.

[*Janet peeps from beneath Jackie.*]

JANET : It's your uncle, Mr. Resurrection Rees.

[*Jackie rises slowly and faces his uncle.*]

JACKIE REES : I thought so. Still keeping the urge on the hop, uncle? How are you, sir?

REV. REES : I shall be a lot better when I see a set of iron bars around you, you disgraceful vagrant. And you others, to your homes. It's little wonder that Mr. Luxton finds you incapable of doing a fair, decent day's work. Shuffling about the foundries like a gaggle of torpid ghosts. Little wonder, gallivanting here like goats with nightfall just a finger or two away. Last Sunday you were in the place of God, listening to my cries for a cool cleanliness. Tonight you gallivant like stoats at the behest of this demented whore-master. He has only to appear for the pest of promiscuity to break out again, the pest that once threatened to break the back of our people beneath the weariness of depletion and the multiple complications of a teeming bastardy.

JACKIE REES : You're certainly blowing on your chips tonight, uncle. Your tongue's a gelding-knife and no mistake.

REV. REES : Go, you others. I have things to say to this man, family things.

JACKIE REES : Stay where you are. He's just one of a whole legion peddling brands of death. He drains your hearts of heat to make a true gift of it to that ironmongering scamp on that hillside yonder. You

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are making a hobby of being cowed and dispersed every time these dervishes start to howl their case for submission and toil. Let us break the theological teeth of this chipmunk, then let's restart our revels.

[The lovers resume their crooning tune and turn once more to their little Venusberg on the hillock.]

REV. REES : Consider, you people. This man is a phantom. He was not here yesterday; he will not be here tomorrow. He'll be on his way, shattering fresh maidens, subverting honest artisans. But you'll be here. And I'll be here. Mr. Luxton, the ironmaster, will be here, and the furnaces in which you work will be here. His sort of laughter and his sort of freedom are death.

[In the Top Right of the stage a darkness forms, and into it Jackie's friends back. Jackie turns to them and tries to beckon them to come back.]

JACKIE REES : You've got them, uncle. You and Luxton have found the words, the mood, that put the snuffer on their dreams.

REV. REES : No dream was ever snuffed by lifting men and women above the level of cats and dogs. *(He steps nearer Jackie.)* I told you never to return to this place.

JACKIE REES : I came back here by error. I travel in circles.

REV. REES : Narrowing and vicious circles. You've had your chances. Twice I sent you to the theological colleges. In the first you inveigled the Principal's wife into mortal sin on a vestry bench. In the second you exploited a summer full of sun-strokes and converted three of the students to

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Mithraism, and sent two of the others hurtling into the Towey in an ecstasy of disbelief. You have avoided work and chastity as if they were deadly venoms. When you are free and footloose I have a vision of holy wedlock bent with strain and going black and blue with severe bruising. I found you a job in the furnaces that could have made you a captain of industry in twenty years. How long did you stick it? One day.

JACKIE REES : It was a day in late spring. I went to the works down a lane flanked with bushes of laburnum. Have you ever smelled that flower when it is coming fresh out of the night? I went into the foundry. All the laburnums in the land wept with the betrayal. My nostrils ached and bled.

REV. REES : And you went on another of your tomcat errands. Poaching the fish of the masters, poach-the wives of your friends, if you have any. Eighty-nine seductions charged to you in Carmarthenshire alone.

1ST CROW : Ninety, Mr. Rees. The girl with the stammer came back later with a full statement.

JACKIE REES : I bet she did. You moths would see to that. Uncle, you make it sound too easy. You see me a prowling badger, sniffing out of the thicket to try the nearest bedroom door. We are in the same business, you and I. To assuage loneliness, to take the sting out of indignity. You do it with a great poultice of faith and words. I with a controlled burst of small affections.

REV. REES : How dare you compare yourself with me? Look, nephew, I have come far. I am the leader of my denomination. My voice is reaching into corners of the land where enthusiasm of the soul had been dead for two hundred years. I am going to lead our people into a new cult of dili-

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gence, earnestness and restraint. There will be no place for the old outlawries, the old indecencies. They will be confined in a belt of freshly made iron.

JACKIE REES : That will mean a set of completely new postures. But we grow on challenges.

REV. REES : We will rise from the bog of our old improvidence.

JACKIE REES : Then we'll really feel the cold.

REV. REES : That's enough. You are an illness, a fever, a nuisance. You will leave this place tonight.

JACKIE REES : Tonight?

REV. REES : By dawn you will be twenty miles away from here and still moving as fast as your depraved legs can carry you.

JACKIE REES : I could sleep here until morning. I've got lots of friends here.

REV. REES : Any cottages in which you lodged would by morning have a smouldering thatch.

JACKIE REES : And if I stay?

REV. REES : You'll be destroyed.

JACKIE REES : By some miracle of yours?

REV. REES : Tidily, by law.

JACKIE REES : What crime have I done except kindle a fire in a few cold grates?

REV. REES : The new morality creates new definitions of crime, each one elastic, each one a noose.

JACKIE REES : You mean that for the few harmless follies in which I've engaged you'd see me hang.

REV. REES : You're as harmless as foxglove, as hemlock. You're deadly. You operate like the sort of strange smell that maddens animals. You landed back here about fourteen hours ago. Right?

JACKIE REES : About that. I stopped just outside the town to help an old man prune a tree. A bell was chiming ten. I throw that detail in to show I'm not a monomaniac. A chaste antic, pruning.

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REV. REES : Fourteen hours and a ferment spreads. Hundreds of men have stayed from work, have sat in taverns till they curled in stupor, gibbering of some wild utopia of sensual ease and joy. Women have peered furtively into back-lanes in search of lost lovers. And the men who went to work mutter of strikes because a few of their number have been laid off, because a few pence have been whittled off a wage here and there, because a loaf costs a little more. And what image is in the minds of these people when they commit these follies? Yours. What good is it for Mr. Luxton to tell them about shrinking orders from the Government, the swelling costs of imported wheat? What good is it for me to preach to them in times of danger that the first demand of God is a cool compromise on all matters that might end in death or deprivation?

JACKIE REES : What's all this got to do with me? Just an innocent goat, going his way. Ever since I can remember the price of bread has been rising like a lark and wages have ruptured themselves trying to catch its tail. Ever since I can remember, eating has been as sensual as grouse-shooting, and I know houses where evictions have been so frequent, it's been genuinely difficult to get in for people coming out. Ever since I can remember I've known people get the poke from Mr. Luxton's works because they passed your chapel with a frown and exchanged a few pints of ale while talking about the fitness of providence. But I've never talked much about these things. I've tried never even to think about them.

REV. REES : You have ways of moving and looking that would spread disaffection among sheep. (*He turns to his companions.*) You may go now. Wait

for me at the bottom of the lane. We have to see Mr. Luxton before the night is done.

[*Exeunt the two crows.*]

Now Jackie. (*His voice is lower, even more urgent.*) If not for your soul's sake, for your family's, for my sake and for the sake of your father who beat his heart to fragments on the stony thought of your limitless iniquities. Jackie, I am walking to a great end. I don't expect you to see this for you have been walking sightless in Sodom for many a year. Proceeding by touch but striking hard. Upon life, Jackie, there is much dirt and some of us are destined to be primarily cleaners. The bristle on which you will finally be impaled is already in the making. Since my first mission of revival seven years ago I have done much. I have reduced the number of children born out of wedlock yearly from one hundred and thirty to fifteen. I have reduced the number of women beaten black and blue by drunken husbands from three hundred to seventy, a welcome change of heart and colour. I have driven ten idle and blasphemous tavern keepers into the foundries and two of them into the diaconate. Girls who twelve months ago flaunted a drooling carnality now wear a sheath of turgid modesty. I have taken the wild horses of sin by the bridle and slowed them to a gentle trot. If they do kick my flock in the head now it will be an injury, not a decapitation.

JACKIE REES : I'd say you'd slowed sin to a half-paralyzed sidle. Morally, you're a stroke. You've certainly put the roof back on wedlock. If it rains now it doesn't leak. And one might hear things more clearly in life for the decreased rush of ale

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which can be a great deafener. But I still don't see what this has got to do with me.

REV. REES : I don't want the things I've done undone, or gainsaid. Next week I am addressing a congregation in London among whom will be members of Her Majesty's government. My theme : Christian humility in master and man as a healing unguent in industrial relations. It will take my name far beyond these hills, plant the banner of my zeal well to the east of Cheltenham. I want no hindrance from you. I don't want it thrown in my face that I am the uncle of Jackie the Jumper Rees, the most insolent defiler of shrines and trampler of virginities since the opening of Transgression Road. If you were to stand trial for multiple subversion there would be showers of shame from Milford to Shrewsbury.

JACKIE REES : Trial? Uncle Richie, this time I really think you've blown your hymnal. Even in a court of mutes they'd laugh you out of it.

REV. REES : You are the sacramental victim, the expendable pagan. You have no root here. Your passing would provoke tears but no fists. Go ! Tonight. Twenty-four hours from now I may be able to do nothing to help you save quicken your passage to hell. Start walking westward until you reach the sea and you will not pause then. You will continue on foot to Ireland until you confirm your manifest lack of faith in miracles.

[Exit Rev. Rees.

Jackie does a sort of slow hopping dance about the stage. The furnace flickers have started again. He holds out his arms to them, then rejects them.]

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JACKIE REES : We are rarely more than a light flickering between two identities. I could have spoken all the words he spoke. And he, I suppose, could have doubled for me. We inhabit a procession of wombs that grow darker, and we avoid the one authentic birth by acts of clownish mischance. Straighten your legs, Jackie, and get out of this.

[He heads left, away from the furnace flares. He leaves the stage. Music is heard, a great, swinging, sad song. Jackie comes back and starts softly to sing:]

Through the full light of a noisy day
I am someone else with a horse's neigh,
Swinging in joy from heart to heart,
Singing "Darling, darling, till men do us part."
But when music trembles or the sun has set,
I am not at ease, I cannot forget.
My mind breaks silence, I am ill beset
In a yawning gulf of numb regret
For all the beauty I have not met
And which may never come my way.

[Janet comes back. She stretches out her arms to Jackie. Behind through the shadows come Jackie's friends, and in the richest possible harmony they sing the song that Jackie has just sung, changing the singular to plural.]

JACKIE REES : And Richie Rees says, "Come what may, You'll never get lost if you work and pray."
GEORGE CHISLETT *(to Jackie)* : Sand in your bread,
cuts in your pay, Staunch your wound with work
and pray.

JANET : What did he say to you, Jackie?

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JACKIE REES : He said a skyful. It would have taken a whippet to follow it all. Seems Luxton and he have me tabbed as the second instalment of the Black Death. He wants me clear of this place before morning. He talked something about arresting me. Why should they arrest me? What is this iron-smelting doing to the brains of men?

JANET : Don't you really remember, Jackie?

JACKIE REES (*feeling his head*) : No, there are patches of my brain that are as dark as pitch, that don't remember a thing. The lights have been out in them since that damned County Sheriff brought his sword down on my head in Carmarthen town, in that hotel in Carmarthen town.

GEORGE CHISLETT : You know why he did that, Jackie?

JACKIE REES : Because he had a sword, because he was a County Sheriff, because I didn't duck when I saw the old fool coming at me.

GEORGE CHISLETT : The room you were in in that hotel was a bedroom. You were there with the County Sheriff's daughter. You had run off with her. He chased you and found you there. He put two and two together and it added up to a clout on the head for you.

JACKIE REES : And whole fields of the past melted away.

GEORGE CHISLETT : Have you forgotten about the Moses business, Jackie?

JACKIE REES : Moses? What's this now?

GEORGE CHISLETT : It was the year before the County Sheriff business. We'd had a rough winter.

ALL : Oh! a rough, rough winter, Jackie.

GEORGE CHISLETT : And you assembled us on the square. You spoke to us.

ALL : Your voice was a bell that morning, Jackie.

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GEORGE CHISLETT : And you said : I am Moses. I am not Jackie Rees, the Jumper, any more. Like a repentant snake, you said, I have sloughed off folly. For the first time in my life I am going to do something good and earnest.

ALL : Your eyes were big as moons when you said those things. We were wild and hungry and we believed you.

GEORGE CHISLETT : And you said : I, Jackie Moses Rees, will lead you out of this place, out of this pain, away from this degradation. I have a good friend, you said, in North Pembrokeshire. He has a broad, deep valley, full of good grazing land, clear streams and rich soil. He is giving this valley to me. I will take you there. There will be room for you all. You will lead lives full of milk, honey and everlasting passion.

ALL : We could see this valley, Jackie. We could see the grazing, the streams, the richness, the milk, the passion, just from the way your mouth spoke them.

GEORGE CHISLETT : We borrowed carts. It took all of half an hour to load them with our possessions. We followed you.

JACKIE REES : You followed me?

GEORGE CHISLETT : We made quite a procession. Mr. Luxton and the justices and the policemen laughed as we passed the western boundaries of the town. You looked back as Ferncleft was just about to vanish from sight and you said : "You will never know the furnace-stink again, the killing glare of the fires."

[Jackie looks at the faces around him with intense curiosity.]

JACKIE REES : This valley. What was it like?

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GEORGE CHISLETT : We never saw it, Jackie. We never got there. At Llanddarog, near Carmarthen, we ran into smallpox. A half of us died. A quarter of us were jailed for vagrancy. The rest came back here.

JACKIE REES : Was I drunk?

GEORGE CHISLETT : You were sober as a tree. It was early in the morning. All you'd had was a stoup of the Widow Evans' nettle beer which is, so to speak, a cure for drink.

JACKIE REES : A man will say, when awake, the things he hears in sleep. People hear, people believe. No wonder I've spent so much time alone on the hilltops. That's the only safe place for me, by God. Tell me, what's brewing about here, except iron and Widow Evans' nettle beer?

ALL : Trouble.

JACKIE REES : Of what colour?

ALL : Striped.

GEORGE CHISLETT : We have a little union in the works. Sort of sick benefit thing. If you lose your wits we lend you a new set. If you're blown up, we help you land. Simple charity. They'll smash that for a start. Your uncle, the reverend, says he saw the devil with a union card.

JACKIE REES : He sees everything.

ALL : It was a vision he saw at Llandrindod Wells.

JACKIE REES : Those waters. Kidneys wholly flushed supercharge the vision. (*to George*) What else?

GEORGE CHISLETT : Roofs will rise trying to keep up with the rent. So many evictions the men will be in the middle of the street asking what the hell happened to the sights and sounds they love. Luxton will import new workers from Ireland and the north, specially stooped to cope with the new wage level. And they'll probably whip back a part of the

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old truck system. Your uncle says the old family spirit of love and trust in industry was really ruptured when we demanded payment in anything as cold as wages. So back'll come the old truck. You've heard about working for bread and getting a stone.

JACKIE REES : Mm.

GEORGE CHISLETT : Well, we get clinkers. Option, clink.

JACKIE REES : They are really on form, on top form.

ALL : Speak out for us, Jackie. Sing out for freedom, boy.

[Jackie looks around most craftily.]

JACKIE REES : Oh ! no, I'm not going to speak. I'm not going to sing. Tonight I saw something in the eye of that uncle of mine that really put the chill on me. We're not joking any more, are we? Death is very clearly on the agenda. And something must have happened to me in that last trip around the hills. People didn't seem to want me around any more and I didn't want to stay. When I used to sit with them around the fire at night and sing them my songs, I'd stop in the middle of a verse and say what the hell. I'd look around at the bare kitchen I was in and feel on my neck a draught from all the loose, rattling windows of the world, and I said to myself that there is nothing in life that is worth vocally more than a short moan. At the last farmhouse I stayed at, the farmer's daughter and I hit it off. She promised to join me on my palliasse one night. She did not come to me. And the palliasse was wet from a week's rain and a most considerable leak in the roof.

GEORGE CHISLETT : Something detained her, Jackie.

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Her father found out or she read a pamphlet about honour or disease. No girl in her right senses would betray you, Jackie.

JACKIE REES : I've had rheumatism ever since. My legs are slower. No, she wasn't detained. She didn't forget. I went to look for her. I found her. She was sharing the palliasse of the ploughboy. He was fifteen years younger than I. And he had a dry palliasse.

GEORGE CHISLETT : You killed him?

JACKIE REES : No, no. I'm telling you. Flames have gone down inside me. I felt no anger, no shame. Just a bit more draught as I stood there in my shift in the attic. I wished them well and borrowed some goose-grease from the ploughboy to rub my aching joints. And there was another farm before that. The man was jealous. He slipped whitelead into my broth. He was too mean to buy the full dose and he didn't love his wife much anyway. It came nowhere near killing me but my bowels spelt out the entire alphabet.

GEORGE CHISLETT : You're hungry and thirsty, Jackie. Two days of drinking, talking, dancing, and you'll be the same old Jackie.

JACKIE REES : No. I'm going to make an offering to Mr. Luxton and the Reverend Richie Resurrection Rees. The idle, seditious goat becomes the dedicated gelded toiler. I shall make amends for every slight I've ever offered the men of wealth and the sectaries. I shall offer myself for employment at the foundries at dawn tomorrow morning. And when I've done my twelve-hour stint, with the filth of labour still upon me, I shall present myself to my reverend uncle and swear upon his fattest Bible that from now on to the grave I shall be the most icily celibate creature this side of a monastery.

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JANET (*laughing*) : No, no, no.

JACKIE REES : Oh ! yes, yes, yes. Even you, Janet, I am now seeing with new eyes. You are as remote as the moon. For the first time in my life I have no wish to touch you except as a brother : I will set new standards of loyalty to Mr. Luxton and my days will be so lighted from within by selflessness that thousands now lost in defeat will once more find a way. I shall touch only the minimum of food and drink to keep passion flat on the kennel floor. The money I save will go weekly to any family named by you as more picturesque in its destitution than any other. I am going to rub the noses of Luxton and my uncle into the miracle of change, and even without wishing to, they will grow more reasonable in their dealings with you. Now, no more frivolity. To bed. I'll kip down with you, George, and no one will be stirring earlier than I tomorrow. And if you hear of any funerals going on, give me the wink. I'll be there, giving the final gloss to gloom and bringing tears to the boil.

GEORGE CHISLETT (*to his friends*) : His uncle must have beaten him about the head with that black, stiff hat he wears for the big meetings.

ALL : Start laughing again, Jackie. You've fooled us long enough.

JACKIE REES : I don't want to laugh again. I can't wait to see myself abject, silent, tossed at the feet of those roaring destructive bastards who are giving the new black shape to life.

JANET : It's that wet palliasse that's affecting you, Jackie. Tomorrow I'll make you a pair of thick flannelette drawers that'll drive the cold from your loins.

[*Jackie strikes a demure, penitential pose and lifts*

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his eyes to heaven to signify that his virility has officially and for ever crossed the Jordan.]

JACKIE REES :

It'll be lovely not to be different,
It'll be lovely just to be cool,
Never again to say the wrong word,
To be a plain conformist fool.
And as the birds of freedom moult,
Haul down the emblems of revolt,
Pull the golden visions down,
Salute a shy and castrate clown.

ALL :

One more Judas, one more Judas to plague us,
One more Judas, one more Judas to bear,
One more changeling, one more chiseller to fox us.
One more sack-cloth, one more sack-cloth to wear.

JANET : How do you think they'll be wearing the sack-cloth this spring?

WOMEN : Short.

[The furnace flares are crazily enlarged and intensified. They all turn round and look in terror at the new brilliance.]

JACKIE REES : What's this now?

ALL (*quite happily*) : Apocalypse !

JACKIE REES : No. Apocalypse will be dark and ordinary. Tax-collectors, sergeants, preachers and lawyers; an unlighted lot.

[Three men, in postures of revelation, appear at the top of the hillock.]

1ST MAN : Luxton is raking out the furnaces. Every

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foundry for four valleys around will be stone cold by morning, and will stay cold until we meet Luxton's terms.

2ND MAN : They've brought the army into Birchtown. There was a clash on Birchtown Square an hour back.

JACKIE REES : Clash? What about?

2ND MAN : Human rights and the allocation of Birchtown's four full-time harlots. The mayor read the Riot Act.

GEORGE CHISLETT : He knows it by heart. It's the only steady reading the man's ever done.

2ND MAN : The soldiers fired their guns. Two of ours are dead.

JACKIE REES : As long as death is about somebody'll use it.

GEORGE CHISLETT : There was no other way for you but this, Jackie.

JACKIE REES : What do you mean? No other way?

GEORGE CHISLETT : The cobbles of the road were laid down for you a long, long time ago.

JACKIE REES : There is no road. From hour to hour we have the say : north or south.

GEORGE CHISLETT : Tomorrow morning you were going to submit to bondage, forswear the sun and stand as suppliant at the smelting works of Ironhead Luxton.

ALL : The smelting works are cold.

3RD MAN : In the white hillside mansion of Luxton, the County Sheriff and the colonel of militia are making plans for the defence of the realm, the future of iron and the freedom from molestation of Luxton's three lovely daughters, Arianwen, Eirlys and Mona. With them is the Reverend Richie Resurrection Rees, and with him is a clutch of fellow divines. They are arranging the uprooting of

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impiety, the cauterization of unbelievers, and the banishment of lust to points north of Hudson's Bay. From now on the footloose fornicant will need to be a bit of a trapper as well.

JACKIE REES : That won't bother me. I've handled my last pelt.

GEORGE CHISLETT : Tomorrow you were going into the presence of your uncle, the Reverend Richie Resurrection Rees. You were going to dust your hymnal, apologize to the nearest Bishop and give the Reverend Rees a souvenir package of regrets for all your infidel midnights. And the Reverend Rees will already be gathering the faggots for your hot and final redemption. That's about the only positive thing you can say about iron foundries. They took people's minds off heat as the best conceivable cure for heretics. You, Jackie, will be the last to burn. And the slowest. After that palliasse. You don't know what kind of a name you've made for yourself. Every time one of Luxton's foremen puts his boot into a loafer he says : "Who do you think you are, Jackie the Jumper?"

JACKIE REES : I will do as I said. I have lived wantonly and unwisely. In a social way I have created much bewilderment by prescribing the witless anarchy of childhood as a valid way of life to the grave. In a sexual way I have made confusion as fixed an article of furniture in as many bedrooms as the wardrobe. There has been very little evil in this. Ever since I was able to see over a shawl I have never been able to see cold hands without wishing to warm them. I have never been able to see a stricken face without wishing to bring it joy. They had to tighten the shawl to stop me starting too soon on those astonishing capers. Also, I owe much to my uncle who had a matchless knowledge

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of every aphrodisiac herb that grows between Llantrisant and Llanpumpsaint.

GEORGE CHISLETT : We'll gather a bagful for you tomorrow, Jackie.

JANET : We've worn you like a light, Jackie. Stop guttering.

GEORGE CHISLETT : They'll reject you and destroy you, Jackie, if you go near them. But you won't. Your road's laid down.

JACKIE REES : Nothing is laid down; nothing is foretold. From moment to moment we can lay hands on life and scare it out of its trousers. Here, on the breast, you have a compass or a till. You have no till. You are free to choose direction.

[The people turn slowly around and point in each direction of the compass. Each time they shake "No" with their heads, and when they finally face front again their fingers point to the ground.]

GEORGE CHISLETT : The compass says what it's always said, Jackie. We stay here.

JACKIE REES : And so do I. My whole life has ripened to this one point.

OLD MAN (*holding up his hands prophetically*) : God be with you, Jackie boy. Go forward, boy. I see through the days to come. You'll be a martyr, Jackie. They want to hang somebody special. Let it be you, Jackie. You are martyr meat. Your corpse will shine like stars for us. The tears we'll shed for you will make us clean and strong. The three lovely daughters of Luxton will take pity on you as you wait to die. They will love you. It will be the death of the century.

JACKIE REES : Do you know something? That isn't all nonsense. I will go to the Reverend Rees and

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Mr. Luxton. I will say : You, uncle, you, Mr. Luxton, are fools, heavy-weight fools. I am a fool. I have come to join you. We have a full hand. We have all won. Now, let's give folly a hundred years rest. Let's drop the mask of idiocy we feel obliged to wear for pride's sake. Let's give a respite to the starvers, burners and hangers.

GEORGE CHISLETT : You're going to say all that to Luxton?

JACKIE REES : Every word.

GEORGE CHISLETT : Get your mouth very close to his ear. He had his skull-bones case-hardened in his father's first foundry. Was that right, Jackie? What you said about your memory going and all that?

JACKIE REES : No. There's nothing I forget. (*He pats his head.*) Everything as fresh as dew, damn it. But it's nice to put it about that you might have a belt of darkness somewhere inside there. It's nice to be able to turn an idiotic look at people when they come at you with questions sharpened to kill. I must practise my approach. I must let my jaw drop a little to reduce brightness or they might suspect me of some satirical motive. I must let my shoulders droop to suggest the acceptance of toil as the imperative truss of decency.

[His face and body become transformed as he enters his new role.]

I shall not wait until morning. I shall go up to the hillside. I shall demand entrance to the mansion of Luxton now, tonight. Assemble tomorrow at noon on the square. I shall be there with the man who hates us tonight. We shall see the embrace of peace, the kiss of restitution.

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[A thematic sound. A melody for brass based on the baritone harmony of the hymn "Hail to the Lord's anointed." The people hum it and the rhythm is fast, compulsive. Jackie leaves the stage. The people become more and more exalted as they watch him make his way.]

GEORGE CHISLETT : That whitelead may not have killed him. It certainly gave him a jolt. He's walking faster.

[The singing accelerates.]

He's breaking into a run. He can't get to Luxton and his uncle fast enough.

[A man appears on the left.]

4TH MAN : There's a warrant out for Jackie. They are charging him with organizing the riots that led to the deaths in Birchtown.

GEORGE CHISLETT : Jackie's running.

JANET : He always ran to his pleasures.

GEORGE CHISLETT : Where's the pleasure in this?

JANET : He'll know.

[A great sound of galloping horses.]

ALL : The militia. The mounted boys. Out for blood.

GEORGE CHISLETT : Jackie's blood. He's fallen. He's down. They're all around him.

ALL : Come back, Jackie. Come back to us.

GEORGE CHISLETT : They're putting chains on him.

ALL : Jackie the Jumper, in chains.

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[Their bodies droop as if they feel the weight of the imprisoning irons.]

GEORGE CHISLETT : They've put the chains on his hands, his feet. They are pushing him forward. He's fallen again.

JANET : How dare they do that to him !

ALL : How dare he do this to us ! Our Jackie, the everlasting vagrant, the singing boy, the tireless lover, a fettered fool. What'll they do to him, George ?

GEORGE CHISLETT : *You* know.

[They all nod "No, no".]

No, you don't know, do you ? And your ignorance is the deepest grave on earth.

Curtain

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The dining-room of the Luxton home. At the head of the table is the ironmaster, John "Ironhead" Luxton, a man of about fifty, intelligent, a little stooped and apprehensive. The other guests are Rev. Rees, the County Sheriff and the Colonel of the County Militia, the last two in uniform and all radiant with assurance. The company is completed by Luxton's three daughters, Mona, Arianwen, Eirlys. On a small platform, right, there will be a modest type of harp.

COUNTY SHERIFF : To crown that splendid feast, I have but one favour to ask.

[Luxton raises his hands in a "The house is yours" sort of gesture.]

Some music from these lovely ladies.

REV. REES : A balm for these unquiet times.

COLONEL (*who exhibits tone-deafness in his every gesture and inflection*) : Indeed.

[Mona goes to the harp and plays a melody which will allow her sisters to engage in tender frills of counter-melody. Luxton and Rees gaze at them in almost besotted affection. The Colonel's fingers are heard strumming on the walnut of the table, and against the sides of his brandy glass. The Colonel gets up from the table and looks out through the curtain of the window. He does so furtively as if expecting a missile to be aimed at him through the glass. The County Sheriff is much calmer, sitting back, even humming the shadow of a harmony with the music.]

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LUXTON : Colonel, would you greatly mind heeding the music and stop putting me on edge?

COLONEL : There are more stirring things abroad tonight than music, Mr. Luxton. Down there, in that town, among those people, there is no thought of harmony and much thought of murder.

[Mona plucks a sardonic discord from her harp and grimaces at her sisters.]

LUXTON : What will they do?

COLONEL : They follow a pattern.

COUNTY SHERIFF : They will start fires. They will set something alight. The hayrick of some poor farmer fellow or his cottage, or the drier sections of the court where we keep the records of debt.

COLONEL : And by the light of that fire, every cretinous, disaffected cottager will crawl from every cleft of these hills to some central spot where they will demonstrate their wrath.

REV. REES : I will do whatever lies within the word of God to calm them.

COLONEL : In these situations God needs an ample crutch of executive aid. *(He looks out of the window again.)* They will start fires. They need warmth to give them confidence and leadership to make confidence into a weapon. But I give you this assurance. The fires will soon be put out, and whoever is the leader who emerges he will break all existing records for a run to the gibbet.

[He stares hard at Richie Rees who stares back at him without flinching.]

Even though the leader might be the kinsman of

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one we trust. We know where to look, we know where to go. And we have the only thing that is wisdom in these social affairs. Audacity, audacity, audacity.

[*Mona sweeps another great discord into the room.*]

COLONEL : Did I upset you, my dears?

MONA : You upset my harp. I'm quite serene.

[*The Colonel sweeps the curtains back. A blaze rises to the sky.*]

COUNTY SHERIFF : We must go.

[*He bows to the daughters, who have stopped playing and singing.*]

Whenever my lips approach a cup of such enchantment you may be sure that some lout will dash it from my lips.

COLONEL : Give us an hour or less and we'll have coolness back in business.

EIRLYS : We'll see you to the door.

COUNTY SHERIFF : You are so good. Goodnight, gentlemen.

LUXTON AND REES : Goodnight.

REV. REES : God go with you.

LUXTON : And don't make matters worse, gentlemen. Whatever you do, don't make matters worse. But they will, of course. Ironhead Luxton! These damned names stick and settle like ice over one. That was my grandfather, Ironhead. A loud and greedy idiot. He would have used his workers for fuel if wood had not been so reasonably cheap. The Luxton heads have been getting softer since

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that day. (*He strokes his own head.*) Pap, sir, pap. The first Ironhead killed my father, his own son, with overwork, and he had me, at the age of ten, marching about his damned ovens learning to frown and bawl in the approved Ironhead way. I went cross-eyed and hoarse with the effort.

REV. REES : There are men like Moses, Mr. Luxton, who are meant to lead and rule. You are such a man, Mr. Luxton.

LUXTON : That Moses ! He had nothing to deal with half so tricky as the market in iron, lining men and women up at a trough of regular work, the gymnastics of bread supply. Once he killed that overseer all he had to do was walk. And he was convinced that he was next to God. I walk next to you, Rees. And I'm not finding that a tonic.

REV. REES : Anyone who aims his fist at improvidence and the foul-mouthed utterances of the equality-boys walks next to God.

LUXTON : The going is rough, Rees, rough.

REV. REES : Obviously. At every step we are tested.

LUXTON : Did you know I once got out of here, left here on the run ?

REV. REES : You might tell me, Mr. Luxton, but I wouldn't believe you.

LUXTON : I did. I wanted to be a painter. My eyes had been driven mad with the colour I had seen in the furnaces, in the faces of the people I saw streaming in and out of them.

REV. REES : Colour, like love, can be a trap.

[*Mr. Luxton gives Rees a close look and it hints at the six or so mordant things that he would like to say.*]

LUXTON : I went to Paris. I had the kind of gentle,

demented manner that seemed to please the looser women. I did well. I painted gay, fleshy faces. Not fish, or trees, or seas, like some people. Just people laughing, people who were getting some clear charge out of life, people who'd never got up at dawn to rake clinker for me.

REV. REES : Poor guides, gaiety and the flesh.

LUXTON : They gave me a good enough light. I came away from France. Settled in London. My grandfather found me. He clobbered me with my easel. I was still cross-eyed with shock when I got back, and my first week at the furnaces was almost bearable because of the stupor I was in. You should arrange for more of that to be laid on, Mr. Rees. Real stupor. I wanted to kill my grandfather. I considered it my moral, social duty to blow his greedy, stupid old head off.

REV. REES : Oh no. This is some distemper, some nightmare you are acting out to fool me.

LUXTON : No nightmare, Mr. Rees. In a crumpled sort of way I am perfectly fit. Confused, but fit. I bought a gun. A cheap gun because my grandfather kept me short of money, and I think the sights must have been fixed by someone who was against violence. Several times I tried to shoot my grandfather when he was out in the fields with those damned ferrets of his. But I was no marksman and if I had kept up the attempt I would have wiped out the population faster than my grandfather was trying to do. So I surrendered. I opened my mind to the message of iron. I had my valet scrub my back with the laissez faire doctrine of the Manchester boys. I had a slight surgical adjustment to my nose which made it impossible for the smell of coke and hunger to dominate the odour of port and pheasant. My paintings went

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into the attic and until last night I hadn't set eyes on them.

REV. REES : Burn them, Mr. Luxton. Painting is a recognized wing of sensuality, and the people must not glimpse in you any vestige of flippancy. Not at this moment of challenge. They want, in their dark, quaking world, a message of absolute coherence and conviction.

[Luxton flaps his arms helplessly with only a hint of anger, as if to say "For Christ's sake, spare me that."]

LUXTON : Coherence. A big thing.

REV. REES : Within two days there will be utter peace again. Your tremors of doubt will have passed. You will see yourself as the rest of us see you. A man of unique social value and power; a man warmed by the love of all his working people, unaffected by the present blight of disbelief; a patron of science and a friend of the arts; and the father of three of the loveliest daughters in the realm whose wealth and beauty might well win them the hand of princes.

LUXTON : You are truly God's trumpet, Mr. Rees. After a session on you he must feel whacked. Now tell me, what have you got against that nephew of yours?

REV. REES : I'd prefer not to speak of him.

LUXTON : Half the time I'd prefer not to listen to you. But I do. So answer my question. Why make him so special a target?

REV. REES : He is a man of moral character so loose that he has to turn back every five minutes to pick it up. He is a tramp, a defiler of holy matri-

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mony and a subversive anarch. In the minds of many of his dupes he has replaced the image of God with the idol of a loaf.

LUXTON : I know exactly how he feels. And I see the point of a lot of it. I tasted some of it myself once and the flavour was fine. Where is he now?

REV. REES : Here. He had the insolence to return.

LUXTON : And you want him destroyed.

REV. REES : Destroyed? My dear Mr. Luxton, my whole life speaks for the Gospel of Peace, for the unguent of love.

LUXTON : Mr. Rees, we are both mature men. If we are to make fools of words and ideas let us, at least, shake our clowns' caps at each other as we do so.

REV. REES : I want my nephew warned. His life is a sty. I want it cleaned. But without violence. I want him to appear before the magistrates and to be told to desist from his mischief. It's an ethically directed bit of house-cleaning, no more.

LUXTON : The first broom I heard of with a rope on it. I heard every word you said last night to the County Sheriff and the Colonel of the Militia. You thought I was dozing over my wine. I wasn't. You three had given me a pain in my head-bones. I was resting. You were striking blows for decency right, left and centre. You convinced them without any difficulty at all that your nephew should be hounded down and hung up. This fascinates me, Mr. Rees. You want a part of what he is, has been. You want to inherit part of the vacuum that will be left when he dies.

REV. REES : You need the doctor, Mr. Luxton.

LUXTON : We both do, Mr. Rees. But he hasn't got the cure.

[He tears back the big damask curtains on the back

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window. There is a dying flare of light from a distant hillside.]

The last furnace. The smoke holes will be grey and silent tomorrow morning. These hills will cool off for the first time in eighty years. Some strange things will come out of the new coldness. If we could all be raked out from time to time that would be nice.

[He adopts a posture which is almost one of cowering self-defence.]

What are you people trying to get me into? Why didn't I let things go quickly and naturally to the devil, which is what they are meant to do? What a pack you are in with, Rees. The law-jugglers, the mountebank interpreters of God to man, the warriors who want a bit of cut-rate glory between the vast national butcheries.

[Hooves and sounds of shouting men.]

REV. REES : The soldiers. The County Sheriff and the Colonel. You'll get a new strength from them.
LUXTON : I don't want strength, new or old. You are not going to drag me along with this. According to the book this business of belting the hell out of those smelting helots should give me some sweetness of satisfaction. But all it does is plant the taste of death on my lips. The nerves of the tough boys wilt and a stammer like myself is thrown into these proceedings. I want to speak out loud the things my mind has been muttering in between the market booms and hunger riots. I don't want to go floating into time as the man who initiated three

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new types of deformity in undernourished children.

REV. REES: A mere perverse bending of limbs. Some pre-sexual gambit.

LUXTON: Those children would never have been capable of that, save with a couple of friends bolstering them up from the back. In a world almost totally unlit I shall confess to having created a little light. I'll go up to the attic. I'll get those pictures. I'll trundle them around those hovels. I'll show them the other side of my moon.

REV. REES: Your pictures! They'd throw them in your face or use them as kindling.

LUXTON: Good. Art is meant to spread warmth even if it means having one's canvases crackling in the grate. I'll get my paints. I'll use my ledger-books as palettes. I will write one great apology across the earth. Sorry! Sorry! This is the coke and clinker boy coming to heel. I will offer my own pelt as a girdle to mute the rattle of old iron in the body of our kind.

REV. REES: We all stand under sentence of progress, Mr. Luxton. Some of us would wish it otherwise. At the heart of our belief is the Garden of Eden, a calm and smokeless bower. But we must artificially extend man's muscle if he is not to subsist on the same slender margin as the jackals.

LUXTON: So be it. We must have iron. And we'll have iron. Tomorrow morning those furnaces will be lit again and I shall try to view the smelters as things of at least as much significance as the stuff they smelt.

REV. REES: Do that and they'll tear you apart.

LUXTON: I'm already torn apart. If I weren't I wouldn't have the feeling that I'm walking with the sort of boldness that normally lands a man in bedlam. And if any more bits of nobility come

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sailing in here to inspect my daughters for possible marriage, I'll slap them permanently on the night shift in front of the furnaces that are most likely to blow. I'd prefer to see them married to some shepherd who could speak to them without any cunning afterthought of gain, without flourish, without affectation. There's a lot to be said for that nephew of yours. What's his name?

REV. REES : He is a wretch, a menace. If our morals are blue in the face watch for his fingers on the windpipe.

LUXTON : Any man who follows, however imperfectly, the ideal of an unconditional freedom is not a wretch. He is a bird worth watching. What do the people call him?

REV. REES : His name is the same as mine. Rees. Jackie Rees.

LUXTON : What do the people call him?

REV. REES : I have no idea. My work is preaching the word, laundering the urges of fallen man, presenting you men of enterprise to the labouring mass in a clearer Christian light, drying out the drunken, supplying a prop of pride to the chaste in their lonely trials.

LUXTON : It's a big programme, Mr. Rees.

REV. REES : It fills my life. It keeps me too busy to have the time to catalogue the region's lechers.

LUXTON : They call your nephew Jackie the Jumper. Why?

REV. REES : He possibly has some twitch. I had a palsied uncle. The thing might be going through the family.

LUXTON : They call him Jackie the Jumper because he doesn't settle in any one place, because he accepts no organized work. He stirs people's dreams into a hot broth with his gospel of a love and joy

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achievable here on this earth. Sexually he has prowled like a tireless tom over the roof of a nation's desire. He has me, with my foundries, and you, with your condemned-cell ethic, ticketed as a pair of tricky and undesirable monkeys.

REV. REES : Which is why he must be thrust away.

LUXTON : Which is why I must see him. This is a time when everyone must be heard. Heard and respected. Even when it outrages the hard crust of reason that forms around our self-interest. Respected.

REV. REES : There are those whom it is treacherous and fatal to respect.

LUXTON : Whatever the Colonel and his troop might say to the contrary, the only sweet and worthy death is to die in an effort to communicate.

[*Knock on door.*]

Here is the anti-communication squad.

[*Door opens. A flunkey appears and begins to make an announcement, but before he can produce his second word he is pushed forward by two large, gleaming men, the Sheriff and the Colonel done up in the most lavish and glittering cloaks available for cavalry officers of the period. The musical flavour of their entrance could be a fiercely fast version of the Welsh folk-song "Hunting the Hare". Mr. Luxton ducks behind a chair at the sight of them. He bends down as if trying to see what is at their feet.*]

LUXTON : They haven't got their horses with them, thank God. Rees, I can take even when he's bounc-

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ing on a theme of Apocalypse. But these uniforms, they make a dwarf out of me.

[The County Sheriff and the Colonel of Militia solemnly advance and shake Mr. Luxton by the hand.]

What's this for?

COUNTY SHERIFF : You are safer than you were twenty-four hours ago.

LUXTON : Tell me about that.

COUNTY SHERIFF : Things came swiftly to a head and we chopped the head off. All we have to do now is wait for the blood to congeal and the patient will be well.

LUXTON : What have you been doing?

COLONEL : It might have been a little campaign, Mr. Luxton, but it went perfectly. A mob gathered in the main square at Birchtown, five miles to the east of here. They meant mischief.

LUXTON : The people in Birchtown always look as if they mean mischief. It's just the way they feel about Birchtown. They're harmless.

COLONEL : Not that lot. They were going to storm the court-house and burn the debt-records, and then string up a couple of bailiffs as desert. Then they were going to burn down two bake-houses as a protest against the dearer loaf, as if the wretched bakers had any say in the scarcity or abundance of wheat.

REV. REES : How true, Colonel, how true. We are all between the thumb and finger of God. He exerts pressure or lets us breathe, as his love for us waxes and wanes. All of us, bakers, barons, buzzards, barnyard fowl. The thumb and the finger.

LUXTON : You ought to pay a special tax on your metaphors, Reverend.

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REV. REES : One of those bakers is known to me. He is one of my precentors. He has a sweet, clear tenor voice. I trust they came to no harm.

COLONEL : None at all. We rode our horses through them. They were adamant, sullen, calling for torches and telling the bakers to get ready for some really overdone crust.

REV. REES : Anybody who launches that type of joke in a context of civic disorder want watching.

COUNTY SHERIFF : Then Mr. Benyon, the mayor, read the Riot Act.

REV. REES : A splendid voice for proclamation, the mayor. At our prayer-meeting he is a supplicant of real quality. He calmed them, no doubt.

COLONEL : They would not disperse. They treated the mayor to abuse. They charged us. I ordered a sabre charge. Two died.

LUXTON : Whose two?

COLONEL : Their two, obviously. We, Mr. Luxton, are the County Militia.

COUNTY SHERIFF : They threw a burning brand into Mr. Rees's church. It landed on a pew but it would not burn.

REV. REES : A hint of miracle there.

LUXTON : Miracle and the endemic dampness of wood throughout the region. What happened after you got your corpses?

COLONEL : The rest fled.

COUNTY SHERIFF : If I get my guess you'll need a telescope to see a trouble-maker around here for the next ten years. And, of course, you know the furnaces were raked out this evening.

LUXTON : I saw the light fade.

REV. REES : Symbolic. This will cool the bowels of their wrath.

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COUNTY SHERIFF : It will. Two or three weeks of hunger will bring their fever down.

[Luxton walks around them, staring at them in bewilderment.]

LUXTON : You're all doctors, aren't you? Whenever life turns you see a taint of disease. You keep humanity so steadily on the hop no wonder the thing has a chronic hernia.

REV. REES : Mr. Luxton has been very depressed tonight. He even spoke of treating with these people, of restarting the furnaces tomorrow.

[The Colonel and the County Sheriff take Mr. Luxton, one at each arm, and walk him briskly around the stage.]

COLONEL : We are the dispellers of doubt, Mr. Luxton. Doubt is squalid. We cannot afford it. Without our cool conviction of rightness life would liquece.

COUNTY SHERIFF : The Colonel speaks for the Crown. I speak for property. Without those two pillars there can be no framework for order.

REV. REES : Mr. Luxton does not realize that without the few hints of discipline thrown out by theology, business and war, the masses would be a rabble of goats.

LUXTON : Very sound axioms. We'll have them printed and pinned to the shrouds of those two cadavers on Birchtown Square.

COLONEL : Do not sentimentalize, Mr. Luxton. Had our sabres not seen those two fellows to the door they would have had their finish in a tavern brawl or an incontinent bed. It does no harm to give

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nature a little push if it will serve to teach better manners to the more sportive tenants of the sty. I cannot recognize as fully human anyone who does not see the instant truth of these propositions.

LUXTON : I'm fully human. I see the pillars. I see the framework. I am for order, God help me. (*He breaks loose.*) Now put me down. That was a very smooth trip.

COUNTY SHERIFF : You are the last person to have any qualms in this crisis, Mr. Luxton.

LUXTON : Because I am an ironmaster ?

COUNTY SHERIFF : No. As a father. Your daughters are jewels, all the better for being set in this dusky ground. In all the great houses from Maidenhead to Mold they are the toast.

COLONEL : Eirllys !

COUNTY SHERIFF : Arianwen !

REV. REES : Mona !

[*Their eyes are alight with enthusiasm and desire. Luxton watches them cautiously and as if with a bud of new understanding in his mind.*]

COLONEL : We captured a man tonight. Same name as yourself, Reverend Rees.

REV. REES : A major Welsh tribe, the Rees's. They are all over.

LUXTON : It's his nephew, Jackie the Jumper Rees. A moral grasshopper. He gets a bonus from the clergy for serving as a walking text. The Reverend Rees shovels the clinker from around the neck of the species on Sunday, and the Jumper has them back in position on the Monday.

COUNTY SHERIFF : If I were you, Mr. Luxton, I wouldn't talk about the man so flippantly.

LUXTON : I'm sorry. I must have a touch of the

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moon. I had an attack of the quinsy right on top of listening to the Reverend Rees give three sermons in one day. First I couldn't swallow. Then the world seemed to be having the same trouble. In what way exactly is he supposed to frighten me?

COLONEL : Our best informants tell us that it was he who organized the rising in Birchtown. And I suppose you've heard that he serves as a kind of symbol of virility, an inter-shire stallion, seconded to the agitators during lulls at the County Stud.

[Rees lifts up his hands in repudiation of his nephew's infamy.]

LUXTON : These reputations can be very spurious, Colonel. There is so much torpor in the field of sex that a stirring of a finger can sometimes look like a major assault. In the kingdom of the castrate the one-eyed man or whatever you'd call him is king.

COUNTY SHERIFF : You little know, Mr. Luxton. This man has been heard to threaten that he will ravish each of your three daughters before these troubles are over. In view of the public, if possible, and executed with every flourish of virtuosity as part of a final programme of vengeance on behalf of the oppressed.

COLONEL : And the unfulfilled. He mentioned those too.

LUXTON : He would. It wasn't enough to have hunger, housing problems, the wish to vote, the urge to own. We've got to have this athletic lecher shooting his tongue out like a chameleon. Nothing will happen to my daughters. They are the clearest pool of coolness in this region. They sing, they sew, they talk in low voices. The flesh has cast no sort of shadow on them. They circle clear even of any-

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thing as raffish as gossip. Where's this man now?

COLONEL : Until we are ready to move back to Birchtown he's being held in your stables.

LUXTON : Is he safe ?

COLONEL : He's chained.

[*Luxton grimaces.*]

LUXTON : Chained ! Here ! I'll go and talk to the girls to take the taste of this out of my mouth. I'll bring them in to meet you for a few minutes.

[*Luxton leaves. Rees, the Colonel and the County Sheriff move restlessly, watch each other cunningly as if, in this new situation, they are changing moment by moment, and are trying to determine what the changes consist of.*]

Luxton returns with his three daughters. They have a demure radiance. Their dresses are white and have a theme of lace. Rees, the Colonel and County Sheriff are magnetized by them. The last two make a great whooping fuss of them, but Resurrection Rees, in tribute to his own standing at God's side, hangs back, his eyes none the less lucent with desire.]

LUXTON : You have been saved from something by these gentlemen.

ARIANWEN, EIRLYS and MONA : Oh ! Please tell us what.

REV. REES : We have restored purity to its prime place. Rough hands will not soil you.

COUNTY SHERIFF : Heads will bow in customary respect as you pass through the streets of Fernclef.

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COLONEL : You might by this time have been fleeing from a burning house.

[The girls pass their eyes from face to face. There is no gratitude in their expression, rather a kind of whimsical speculation. Arianwen and Eirlys take their place at the piano and begin playing some cool romance.]

ARIANWEN, EIRLYS and MONA :

A shepherd sang to me through evenings cool
But now I know that love's a fool,
A minstrel offered me his love for crown
But now I know that love's a clown.
A soldier learned with nightingales to croon
But now I know that love's a loon.
A single maid on lonely bed
Will know no harm if love be dead.
Let not my heart in disarray be wooed
May my mind eschew all ardours rude,
May my heart be cool, affections mild,
All pure, serene and undefiled.

[The men are nodding in cordial agreement but they hum, from time to time, an urgent counter-melody which suggests that the Luxton girls might give serious thought to whooping it up a little.]

COLONEL : A splendid sentiment. But you mustn't carry this melancholy too far. Look outward, my dear ladies. Life is full of the most wonderful excitement. If I could only tell you the stupendous tingle I felt in my blood as we galloped tonight from Birchtown.

EIRLYS (*who emerges as the most articulate and*

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resolute of the girls) : Horses depress me. So, in the main, do horsemen.

COLONEL : You've been living in some mist of anxiety. I think you've done too many charity trips among the cottagers. And your father launched you on a raft of books. The mist will lift and you will see the horses in their true, good light. (*He edges amorously towards the girls.*) The horsemen too will fall into position.

COUNTY SHERIFF : I hope so. I sincerely hope so. I think it's a shame that you've never ridden with the County Hunt.

EIRLYS : We're fully engaged, Sir George. And we tend to be a little on the side of the hunted. When we distribute our little gift parcels we slip two to the conformist poor and one to the fox.

COLONEL : You should have set them an example, Mr. Luxton. There is nothing inspires more respect in the serving hands than the sight of their natural leader mounted and soaring over hedges and gates.

LUXTON : I tried it. The serving hands were rolling in the lanes at the sight of me soaring over gates and hedges with no horse beneath me. The touch of my buttocks on the horse's back, and the animal would have a passionate craving for the flat. Thirteen times I landed on my head; once on the fox. Frightened the thing to death, I can tell you.

COLONEL : You communicated your fear to the horse and it panicked.

LUXTON : Let's say we did a fair deal.

COLONEL : And, Mr. Luxton, you've done no good immersing your daughters in all those books.

COUNTY SHERIFF : Agreed. You have a library here as large as that in my college at Oxford. Quite excessive. What was the point of that?

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LUXTON: Literacy. You've heard of that thing. Shines well in certain types of shadow.

COUNTY SHERIFF: Demoralizing. Reduces a woman's fluency in the most vital functions. I'd allow my own daughters only the faintest drift of print. Invitations to the County Hunt Ball and then only in the largest print that would not wrinkle the surrounds of their lovely eyes.

ARIANWEN: We take nothing but fine print.

[The three girls peer and grope comically.]

We are moles. Only last week we were reading an account of your estates, Sir George. Have you enclosed any good common land lately?

COUNTY SHERIFF: Not lately.

EIRLYS: None left. What Columbus was to America your grandfather and father were to this county. You really moved in. How are the rabbits taking it?

COUNTY SHERIFF: They are not complaining. They appreciate my work against the foxes and they sustain a peerless army of poachers. What do you think of our young and lovely scholars, Mr. Rees?

REV. REES: I've never been a great believer in reading. At the seminary, the feel of a thick tome would make me feel a convict, and a long staring at print would set the temples of my head apart by the distance of a mile. Contemplation in fields and listening humbly to the talk of humble folk, those are the best doorway to the ministry. I have been astonished by some of the books I have found these young ladies reading. Quite beyond me, I'm glad to say. Voltaire and all those Frenchmen. Jealous, unhappy little men, gripped by the most witless and agonizing doubt. There must always be one side of

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the mind in total darkness waiting for the final illumination.

EIRLYS : You'll see to that, Mr. Rees. You are the wick-snipper extraordinary.

REV. REES : Irreligious doubts in the mothers of the future puts the whole race in jeopardy.

COUNTY SHERIFF : Agree with that. For children, fear of hell is part of the house-training process.

EIRLYS : What if we don't want to join the mothers of the future?

REV. REES : If my branch of the nonconformist church were not against crossing oneself, I would cross myself now.

EIRLYS : Have you ever taken a good look at what happens to marriage and women down in those hovels? We know. We three good Samaritans have looked closer than any of you. Marriage is an antic so exacting it needs perfect soil even to keep breathing with moderate fluency. You provide it with what is strictly a stone patch. Without your permission, gentlemen, we intend to become the three old ladies of Ferncleft, last-ditch spinsters, perverse and inviolable virgins, as dedicated to excluding life as you are to breaking its legs.

COLONEL : Mr. Luxton, tell them not to be lunatic.

LUXTON : I'm taking no sides. Where are the sides? My mind is shaking. If it falls you may push it back.

REV. REES : You have, under God, a solemn duty to perform.

[The three girls take refuge behind the piano.]

ARIANWEN : That was a real rattle of muskets, Reverend.

REV. REES : It lies with you to found a dynasty that

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could give a new grace and dignity to our people.

ARIANWEN : I never thought to see you on the fertility flank.

COUNTY SHERIFF : Mr. Rees is right. Now that the hand-workers are swelling with presumption after the vote, an unlimited supply of dainties and mansions after the style of our own, we simply have to out-breed them two to one.

EIRLYS : What a gruesome thought. Here's a counter slogan. Liberty, equality, sterility.

ARIANWEN : We see the way clear. We are going to translate the works of Fanny Burney into Sanskrit and the sacred books of India into rhyming Welsh. We shall continue our works of charity. We shall seek out the paupers and sweeten their stretch with two bits of fresh fruit a year. We shall arrange an escape route for all women trapped into mortal compact with drunken and incorrigible louts.

COUNTY SHERIFF : These people have their own inscrutable brands of happiness. Often when they are at their most squalid they are at their most cosy.

ARIANWEN : That's a useful belief.

REV. REES : There's no sight on earth as uplifting as that of serene faith in lives that are utterly doomed.

ARIANWEN : So you lay the doom on to keep the faith in fresh supply.

COUNTY SHERIFF : My dear young ladies. You play about with these ideas as if they were kittens. You have sport with them and you get some kind of fun from the notion that you are baiting us as reactionary idiots. But these ideas once removed from the sterilizing safety zones of studies and libraries have the mating and breeding power of

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termites. Some observe ants; others pity ants; others again have to crush ants because they realize that nature in the long run favours ants because they are cheaper to keep. Civilization is a protracted argument with nature.

ARIANWEN : You're right, Sir George, only termites won't make iron for Dadda, nor are they expelled from Mr. Ree's chapel for fertility out of wedlock.

COUNTY SHERIFF : We shall show you the real face of this situation. We'll show you the bog of perfidy on which we've thrown up our flimsy cave-dwellings and the choicer type of creature who waits his hour of darkness and chaos to come out of the slime and put his teeth into your lovely necks. By the time we've finished the lesson you'll be rushing in ecstasy to embrace the good, cool bastions of marriage, money and dogma.

COLONEL : We brought in one of the horrors tonight. A ripe example. Name of Rees, Jackie Rees. A nephew, unfortunately, of Mr. Rees here. No fault of his, I'm sure. The man is a bone-idle womanizing pest. He has succeeded in putting work and chastity in the same category as flood and fire as nuisances.

EIRLYS : Where is he now?

COLONEL : In the stables.

EIRLYS : What's he doing here?

COUNTY SHERIFF : Mr. Luxton and I, as magistrates, will turn this room into an emergency court. We will commit him on charges of riot, murder and arson.

ARIANWEN : Bring him in. You'll need a public to see justice done.

LUXTON : Girls, to your rooms, please. I want you to see no part of this.

MONA : Why not? We are the anemones you are

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supposed to be protecting. At least give us a good look at the blight.

LUXTON : Girls, there is pollution in all this business. I want you to have no part of it. Go to your rooms.

EIRLYS : Is this the man they call Jackie the Jumper?

COUNTY SHERIFF : That's the man.

ARIANWEN : Why that name? Does he resemble a frog?

COUNTY SHERIFF : The reference is not so innocent.

MONA : And he is the leader of all these troubles?

COUNTY SHERIFF : Whenever the people grow fractious and slow to work, the voice and the shadow of this man are never far away.

MONA : And after tonight there will be no more troubles?

COUNTY SHERIFF : His removal will cool the hotter heads and chasten the looser tongues.

MONA : So this is by way of being his last appearance?

COUNTY SHERIFF : He will appear briefly for his trial. I cannot see him as a public figure after that.

ARIANWEN : That settles it. We'll not budge until we've had a glimpse of the man.

[Luxton makes a gesture of despair. He goes to a sideboard, pours and bolts a heavy slug of brandy and invites the others by gesture, to do the same. He is suddenly struck by a thought which clearly fills him with a thoughtful apprehension.]

LUXTON : Tell me, Sir George, I just saw behind the theory of this business. How many men have you got guarding us here?

COLONEL : Six.

LUXTON : Six? *(He makes a show of counting the*

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people in the room.) Less than one bodyguard per person. You don't make me feel very secure, Colonel.

COLONEL : It was essential to let the bulk of the force continue into Birchtown. It's there you have the hardest fist of dissension.

LUXTON : What about the people here in Ferncleft? They've seen the furnaces go out. They'll see the lights burning in my house. What if they turn ugly?

COUNTY SHERIFF : No fear. Ferncleft is a blessed town. The men are eunuchs and the women devotional weepers.

REV. REES : A word from me would resolve any fit of temper on their part.

COUNTY SHERIFF : Rees is truly their pastor. Even their hair feels a little woolly.

COLONEL : A large group of them cheered as we galloped through the square tonight.

ARIANWEN : There is a sect of people in that town that cheer at the sight of any horses. They believe horses are on to a good thing.

COLONEL : The one or two who might have been fancying themselves as rebels gave up the ghost when they saw us hunting down the Jumper.

LUXTON : So they'll not cry, nor stir nor molest us?

COUNTY SHERIFF : They are mice. They might nibble at the soft parts of the wainscoting, but apologetically.

REV. REES : Tomorrow there will be a delegation of supplicants at your door asking no more than to live in a world where decisions will be made by God and you alone.

LUXTON : When Rees gives me that kind of talk I feel a terrible draught. Bring in the Jumper. We'll commit him to the County gaol until the next

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Assizes. And if possible let's do the thing in mime. Legal phrases make my teeth ache.

[Exit Colonel. Luxton returns to the brandy. Rees stares out of the window. The County Sheriff stares into a vast wall-mirror, pondering on himself. The girls return to the piano and resume their quiet playing and singing.]

Then the door opens and Jackie, his hands shackled, is thrust in. He has two soldiers in attendance. For a moment he stands, head down, his whole attitude blazing with a taurine defiance. He becomes aware of the music, lifts his head and smiles at the girls.]

JACKIE REES : That's nice, the music. After those stables, that's very nice.

COUNTY SHERIFF : We didn't bring you here to listen to a concert.

LUXTON : Stop playing. Now leave us. Please Arianwen. Lead the way.

[As the girls leave the room, Jackie, with no trace of levity, gives them a short bow. When the door closes the two soldiers at Jackie's side give him another rough shove and he almost falls.]

JACKIE REES (*pointing to his right hand*) : There's a small bone there you still haven't broken. Take care of that or you won't get your bonus.

[One of the soldiers lifts his rifle. Jackie raises the chain that secures his hands.]

Now don't do anything that might rough up this

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splendid parlour. (*He turns to Colonel.*) You did well out there. A small army on horses against one man. You could be another Wellington.

COLONEL : We achieved our limited objectives.

JACKIE REES : And hunting me down like a fox was one of those?

COLONEL : Obviously.

JACKIE REES : Uncle, I see you there in the corner. Don't be shy. Come out and have a good look at me. What kind of a nightmare are you spinning now on the good old doom loom? Tell these people to stop their nonsense. Tell them who I am. Jackie Rees of no fixed abode, a tramp with a preference for lying down, unskilled, out of sympathy with smoke and metal, given, like a dog, to bursts of affection and, like a dog, guilty of no genuine sin. Tell these people to stop advertising their iron on me. There's been some mistake. I'll accept your apology, a meat pasty, a drop of ale and be on my way.

REV. REES : John, my boy. On this occasion your best mood would be humility.

[*Jackie looks curiously at all the faces in the group.*]

JACKIE REES : All right. I'm humble.

REV. REES : Through all the years of your life you have walked darkly, in sin. Now the light is on. Look carefully about you.

JACKIE REES : The view is terrible. What kind of clowning is this?

COUNTY SHERIFF : No clowning. We are cancelling your licence to be a pest, Rees. We've let you roam for too many years on a tether of loose-lipped dissension. Now we are pulling in the rope for more practical use.

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[*Jackie shrugs helplessly.*]

JACKIE REES : No, I wouldn't argue with you. Anyone who can speak to another as if he were a goat cannot be argued with. You are amazing people. (*to County Sheriff*) You have a glacier in each eye. (*to his uncle*) You guide the wind of God's wrath. (*to Mr. Luxton*) But you are quiet inside. So you may be the one to watch.

LUXTON : That's right. Watch me. We are both at ropes' ends, twitching.

JACKIE REES : This talk of rope . . . You mean . . .

REV. REES : I told you to go. But you lingered.

JACKIE REES : What am I supposed to have done?

COUNTY SHERIFF : Conspiring against public order, murder.

REV. REES : Blasphemy, carnality and sloth.

COLONEL : Resisting arrest. Although I don't think we'll be needing that item.

JACKIE REES : I don't think you will. Between you you've rigged up a dishful. Now I don't know what private dreams you are trying to gild here but stop using me as a paint-pot. Let me tell you again; I'm nobody. I have no wealth, no view-point, no hate, no particular love. I was ambling up here tonight to make my own particular peace. To tell my uncle that I have suspended all doubts I might have had about God and the goodness of his creation. That my passions have now the same heat and colour as old coke and women can now walk abroad without a visa from the County Sheriff. And to tell Mr. Luxton that I now acknowledge the need to work. I see it as being as inevitable as death. I give in. I'll make iron. I'll make wealth enough to wipe away the last patch of penury. And if you want to give me time off to clear my head I'll go out into

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the countryside to find fresh recruits for the smoke-holes. Now, please . . . (*He smiles and lifts up his chained hands.*)

[*The County Sheriff, the Colonel and Resurrection Rees all shake their heads, No, no, no! Mr. Luxton watches them all in turn and reluctantly joins them in the headshaking.*]

REV. REES : The people are confused and full of devilish impulses. A good, sudden, dramatic death will show them more clearly than any sermon of mine the need for a new gentleness.

COUNTY SHERIFF : Nothing restores social sanity more swiftly than a significant corpse dropped judiciously on heads made hot by dreaming.

JACKIE REES : You wouldn't be such fools.

COUNTY SHERIFF : We are what we are because we are such fools. If by folly you mean the daring to choose our solution and the right ground from which to hurl it, you, Jackie the Jumper, are going to be hurled. When your neck is broken, lust, laziness and all doubts about the social contract will be dislocated as well. There will be no resistance, no hitch. Your friends might mutter something into their grimy mufflers, then shuffle back into their slum.

COLONEL : We shall stand guard around the gallows to give you plenty of breathing space.

REV. REES : I shall read the lesson from a specially made, resonant pulpit. What I shall have to say in the immediate wake at your death will make you a richer being dead than ever you were in life.

JACKIE REES : I'd feel mean not to come along. I feel almost grateful. All this trouble . . .

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REV. REES : And every shred of it woven by you. It's good to see you here, helpless, hurt, doomed.

JACKIE REES : Uncle, I lose you, I really lose you. (*He moves hand to take in the others.*) These I understand. I can take it from them. Chaining and hanging are part of their games. I don't suppose they regard me with any more malice than they would the badger, otter, fox whose pelt they covet. But you. The words you've uttered. You've given pity a new lease. Your tongue has promoted tears enough to lubricate ten thousand dry and cracking hearts. In this business you should either be at my side or dumb somewhere in between.

REV. REES : At your side ! In this business, as you call it, I am the only one who perceives your full, true guilt. In your image the world would have assumed an animal crouch. Where I have tried to make men upright and aware of the divine goodness, you have scurried like a stoat. I am what you might have been. My passions, too, were wild and clamant. I shouted them down. I tamed them. I clothed them with hints of divine grace and they learned to walk among the children of the earth, giving some succour, doing some good.

JACKIE REES : A fulfilled man is always a pleasure to see.

REV. REES : When I help them kill you, I shall be burying a part of me long dead, that might once have exposed me to danger and shame. In my pocket I have a list of one in ten of your transgressions.

JACKIE REES : One in ten ! Why the reticence ?

REV. REES : I grew tired of the research. A black business. I followed your trail of iniquity with loathing and devotion. There is no one better qualified to be your judge and sexton.

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JACKIE REES : Whatever men exchange carnality for, they're on to a bad deal.

[*Mr. Luxton shoots his head up.*]

LUXTON : What was that?

COLONEL : I hear nothing.

LUXTON : You haven't kept your ears cocked as intensely as I. I hear something.

COUNTY SHERIFF : Your daughters singing from an upstairs room.

COLONEL : My men talking in the courtyard.

LUXTON : No. Many people marching and singing.

COLONEL : I hear nothing.

LUXTON : This is one of the advantages of living inside a really mature panic. One can follow life at a distance.

COLONEL : I hear nothing.

JACKIE REES : You wouldn't. Thunder couldn't get through to you.

LUXTON : People singing and marching.

REV. REES : I told them I would speak to them tonight. They are coming here to hear me. I'll address them from one of the windows.

LUXTON : There is no piety in the mission of these people. Their mood is violence, and murder is their guide.

[*A distant sound of the "Hail to the Lord's Anointed" on trumpets, soon joined by a chorus of voices. A sound of violent fighting outside. The two soldiers and the Colonel dive out of the room. For thirty seconds the fury of fighting continues. Then the doors of the room are flung open, George Chislett, armed, comes in at the head of a group of ironworkers.*]

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COUNTY SHERIFF : We are ready to die, although I would have chosen cleaner agents.

JACKIE REES : Oh no, Sheriff. You're a long way behind. We don't play that simple kind of marbles. Sheriff, you are going to be invited to grow up. And you, too, Uncle Resurrection. You are going to be invited to step from the realm of necessity into that of the imagination.

GEORGE CHISLETT : Where to, Jackie? Birchtown?

JACKIE REES : No. Away from Birchtown. Away from Ferncleft. To the "Rising Lark", the loneliest tavern in the land. Two mountains away. For a few days, Sheriff, we are going to raise the banner of a friendly decency and free experiment. (*Jackie throws his head back in a delighted laugh.*) George, get these things off my hands. And you, Mr. Luxton, get your daughters ready for the journey. And you, Uncle, make ready for your first true revival.

The trumpets make a new swoop of triumphant sound. Jackie moves swiftly from the room. The curtain falls as the others make to follow him.

Curtain

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The one and only bar-room of the "Rising Lark" inn. In a corner is a rough counter for the serving of drinks. On the benches are Jackie's friends. They are singing a version of that brisk Sunday School marching song, "Awn ymlaen I'r Buddugoliaeth", a rattling old rouser. From the outside is a noise of hammer on metal. The hammering proceeds in rhythm with the singing. The baritone and bass section is doing a sort of plom, plom harmony that suggests marching.

An old, blind iron-worker, Aaron Mead, is sitting on one of the centre benches. He is tapping out an accompaniment to the song with his stick. On his face is a look of savage melancholy.

AARON MEAD : Jackie, what are those clowns doing in there with their hammering?

JACKIE REES : They've got a bit of a foundry going. They are making pikes.

AARON MEAD : What for?

JACKIE REES : To fight with. We have no rifles, no cannon. So we are making these pikes.

AARON MEAD : Will they do any good?

JACKIE REES : They are a gesture. I tried one out a few minutes ago. It bent. We are aiming at a pike that will bend into the shape of a question-mark, so that our enemies will get the idea that we are querying the whole business of violence.

AARON MEAD : When will they come? The soldiers.

JACKIE REES : They've had some more trouble down in Birchtown. And we've spread the news that this place is a fortress with deep defences and a park of artillery. And the only thing we have here that'll go pop is a bottle of Eli Scandrett's old ale. And if I know Eli it'll be a reserved pop. But the lie will

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give the Commander of Dragoons the feeling that he is on to something big, something important. It'll make him happy as he deploys his forces to put paid to us. And that's what we're here for. To make people happy.

AARON MEAD : All folly. Violence should flow from them to us. Our craftsmanship is spread too thin for us to have any joy or skill in killing. The function of the wise is to sit still with a look of pain and amazement on their faces. And people, looking at them, will grow worried, anxious. They will learn caution. And that is the nearest we will ever come to goodness. Caution.

GEORGE CHISLETT : You mean we should have sat down and let them hang Jackie?

AARON MEAD : Exactly. Ever since my eyes went in that furnace-blast I have had a vision. The vision of one of our own, killed for love of us. A gay, laughing one, to whom life means more than for the rest of us. Somebody in whom the dousing of light would have darkened the whole earth. Jackie, in a word. They would have hanged him in the County town. We would have asked for his body for burial in his home town. They couldn't have refused because we would have made our request as Christians and that's a word that makes people tender in their dealings with corpses. We'd have put his body on a farm-cart to strike the note of humility. We'd have followed it to its grave, over the ridges, through the fields, and on the way we'd have sung and wept. And with every tear our ingrained dirt would have grown less, would have been washed from the eyes of our minds. A tremendous funeral. Ten wonderful, educational miles. And your murderers, Jackie, would have been left in a colder day, full of a shuddering, silent

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shame. And your spirit would have gone to provide one more flame for the dawn of a beckoning restitution.

JACKIE REES : I'm glad you put that in about the dawn of restitution. It's always a tonic. I'm with you, Aaron. I can see it all. The grief and the pride. The mourners, the weepers. The ripening wisdom of the bereaved. The County Sheriff wringing his hands with remorse and promising a hundred pounds for a Jackie the Jumper memorial scholarship open to incipient missionaries. There's only one thing about your vision that I don't like. It's the way I'm looking, the quietness of me, on that farm-cart.

GEORGE CHISLETT : Aaron, you're all right. You've been through the mill and most of us have done the trip with you. You've only got one fault and most of our people share it with you. You want your martyrs too cheaply. You want your heroes cut-rate. I want Jackie to live to be a hundred. And I want him to celebrate his hundredth birthday by chopping down a gibbet.

AARON MEAD : Be hopeful, George. Be hopeful while you can. The Dragoons will come soon. They'll be in no hurry. They will carouse in Birchtown for a week or so, sharpening their appetites and laughing at your pikes. They will come. Some will die. There will be no gain in wisdom.

GEORGE CHISLETT : Nothing is ever said, nothing is ever heard. We react like cats and dogs to kicks and blows. That's all.

AARON MEAD : No; there are some who emerge, whose faces, voices, linger and glow in the dark. Like Jackie's might have been. Dead, they would have said of him, he loved his pint and his woman. Now in the cold and silence to which they sent

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him there's no supping or loving at all. People will learn more from that about the crime of deprivation than from a million pamphlets.

JACKIE REES : I see the point of that, Aaron. But I don't want to be a knock to the printers. Let's make do with the pamphlets for a while longer.

AARON MEAD : He'll play the fool here. He'll be choked in a skirmish. No dignity. Not the way they do it. Those soldiers marching with the judges, the tall court-room with its high echoing beams. That great black palaver about the place of execution.

JACKIE REES : And my uncle reading the lesson.

AARON MEAD : Oh ! they stage the thing properly and no mistake. They are the only stage managers to trust. If we are going to have death, let's make a good long song of it.

JACKIE REES : You've almost got me sold on this, Aaron.

AARON MEAD : All you can do is run. Run. The lot of you. Keep running west until you come to water. Then swim. You'll find the same confused, hungry situation among the Irish as you have here. And you'll have to stay there and put down some proper root of understanding because the next patch of water is too broad for the dispossessed, unless they can afford a boat.

JACKIE REES : You've got a fine set of roads fixed up for me, Aaron. Hanged, drowned or starved.

GEORGE CHISLETT : Here's Iestyn Best, the messenger.

[Enter Iestyn Best, panting and bent double from the strain of belting across the plateau. He is given a drink and a series of encouraging pats that knock the last remaining puffs out of his body.]

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JACKIE REES : Anything new, Iestyn?

IESTYN BEST : Yes, and when these boyos stop lambasting the life out of my body I'll tell you.

[They recharge his glass and put him to sit on a bench.]

I was in the Waggoner's Arms in Birchtown. Full of soldiers drinking and singing and taking the maidens off the list of protected game. They wanted a message taken to you. So the captain stood up and looked over the tap-room and he said : "Which of you local men might be serving as a spy for the disaffected artisans?" Nobody moved. Then he said, "For Jackie the Jumper and that lousy lot." And about eight of us stood up and said, "We're spies." We said this because we felt inferior in the presence of all those uniforms. The captain picked on me and he said, "Go and tell Jackie the Jumper that I have no wish to endanger the life of the County Sheriff, the Colonel of the Militia, Mr. Luxton and his three daughters, Mr. Rees, the pastor, or of my own men. So I shall post my Dragoons at intervals of ten feet around the base of the mountain on which he is supposedly defying us. And they will stay there until he, his hostages and partisans come down."

JACKIE REES : Has he done that?

IESTYN BEST : He's done it. I travelled right around the mountain. Every time you take a fresh breath you see a new Dragoon.

GEORGE CHISLETT : So we have to stay here.

AARON MEAD : Jackie doesn't. If the Dragoons were cheek to cheek he would get through them after dark. I've been out poaching with him. He's so

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quiet I lost him four times between the first salmon and the second.

JACKIE REES : I'll stay here. For long, swift running I'm past my best. I have been, as you all know, a man busily depraved in all the ways he could afford. And that's bad on the wind. I might be able to sneak down the mountain and through the soldiers. But in the open country, with them on horses, they'd have me down like a sick wolf under the hour. I'll stay.

GEORGE CHISLETT : I hope you mean that, Jackie. We're here because you are here. We don't want you bluffing us into making a great, last stand here, then giving us a friendly wink and slipping out for a free stroll, never to come back. Is it the thought of those Luxton girls that keeps you here?

JACKIE REES : Who's ever thought of them? In this field many men tend to keep warm on other men's fuel. If my loins had kept up with the popular fancy in this particular, the London physicians would have had me pickled and exhibited as a freak before now. In any case, compared with the cow-girls and plough-girls who've warmed my way, these Luxton girls strike me as . . . waxen, under par. My flesh is austere, cold, ready for some act of passion that has nothing, nothing to do with one man, one woman. I haven't given them a thought.

[Janet, who is in charge behind the bar, starts a sardonic, sensuous little jig to the following jingle.]

JANET :

There are people who'll say you're "also ran",
That love will run no more,
But there's no such thing as a dried-up man
Or a woman who's closed the door.

JACKIE THE JUMPER

Feed the fire at the heart of life,
That's the law; I never broke it.
Love's the fuel at the heart of life,
And the man who complains of the bitter cold,
All the fool's got to do is to stoke it.

AARON MEAD: You should, Jackie, you should. Before you give yourself up, possess them, my boy, possess them. That'll feed the legend a treat. It'll add at least a couple more verses to the ballad I'm going to write about you. That's the most a man can hope for, to add a verse or two to the ballad that'll give free food and booze to a blind man as he goes from pub to pub.

JACKIE REES: I'll see you right for material and rhymes, Aaron. This should be good for a verse. (*He raises his voice.*) Bring in our friends.

[*The County Sheriff, the Colonel and the Reverend Rees come in. They have been divested of their uniforms and are now dressed in the rough jackets and breeches of the ironworkers.*]

Now then, Aaron, you cannot see this but it's really something for the pub concerts.

[*Mr. Luxton and his daughters come in. Mr. Luxton, his costume unchanged, is even more stooped and apprehensive than before. He moves to take up his position with the three other prisoners. Jackie says "Not you," and waves him to a chair, away from the others. Janet, behind the bar, studies the expression on Jackie's face and gives out with a rich little guffaw.*]

Here are three men who cast a big shadow. They

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peeped at us over a wall. Genuinely talented and brave men who have made of their cleverness and courage the tools of a disinfectant aloofness. The sermon, the eviction, the sabre and some differences of dress have worked marvels for them. Now their uniforms are gone and up here there would seem to be little room for their particular specialities.

[Janet raises a glass to toast.]

JANET : To particular specialities in any shape or form.

JACKIE REES : They'll be here soon, the boys with the guns, the swords, the closed minds. While we wait let's let truth out on a tiny length of lead. We'll have a bit of a trial. No judge, and the only jury will be the feeling of what these people have done to us. And of what we've done to them, for they and we have been drawn unutterably out of shape.

COUNTY SHERIFF : Look, Rees. I have no objection to listening to you. Social position carries social responsibilities, and as a magistrate it is part of the cross I bear to have my ear-drums perforated from time to time by the perorations of half-baked Jacobins. But let's have it done in a place that smells a little less of stale ale and fresh human. And if you have made up your minds finally how you wish to hurt and humiliate us, hurry it up and have done with it. You may think your oppression, so-called, an infliction, but it is nothing to the tedium involved in making that oppression a good and sanitary concern.

VOICE : Good point. He's very fluent, the Sheriff.

LUXTON : I am prepared for any martyrdom you may devise for me.

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JACKIE REES : You've got a sort of compassion, Mr. Luxton. That's martyrdom enough for one day. Just sit there and look thoughtful. Give the thing a philosophic gloss.

AARON MEAD : That's the kind of big organ music I like to hear. Martyrdom, compassion. Words like loaves.

COLONEL : I shall still see the moment when I run the lot of you down for good.

VOICE 2 : He really sees us as that, part of a hoof. He's a hell of a horseman, this boy.

COLONEL : And if you wish to see an example of composure, kill me and see how a gentleman dies.

VOICE 3 : In the foundries we see men die with composure all the time. It's no novelty. It doesn't prove anything.

JACKIE REES : We don't want to kill you. We don't want to martyr you. We don't want to molest you. We don't even want to take anything away from you because if we did the Government boys in London would take it away from us in two shakes of a dead attorney's quill. No, we plan to give you in fuller measure those things which, in the past, have given you the greatest joy. Tell me, uncle, what have you most enjoyed doing?

REV. REES : Preaching.

JACKIE REES : To what end?

REV. REES : To persuade and convert.

JACKIE REES : Or to bewitch and seduce. You know you've based a lot of your life on the belief that you are so different a man from me. You've made yourself a fine, high platform, introducing God to his guests as rotundly as a good butler. Me you've depicted as a rampant and disgraceful stallion tramping the hills, vales and virginities of this land. But we're the same man working from different

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ends. I am the carnal boy with a post-coital urge to sermonize. You are the preacher who creates before him a vague cloud of generalized lust.

REV. REES : A lie.

JACKIE REES : I've watched the faces of women after you have been pelting them with the hot words. Had it not been for two hours on a hard bench and six layers of thick clothing they would have put their cool piety in pawn for you, any place, any time. I envy you, uncle. You've had the real excitement, the real melting union. And always with pride and exaltation. No shame, no betraying weakness.

REV. REES : You dare to say that we are but shadows of each other. Go on, order me to a life of depravity and I would starve to death rather than yield one jot of the contempt I feel for your sort of squalor. Order me to silence and through the strength of my spirit alone I would, given time, chasten your brood off the earth.

JACKIE REES : I would not have you depraved or silent, uncle. I would have you fulfilled. We are having one of the outhouses converted into a chapel. You will preach there. The place will be packed with your finest congregation. You can preach without cunning. You may expect no preferment from this performance. Nor yet disgrace. There will be maidens in your audience. They admire you. They will respond like harps to every plucking of your tongue.

REV. REES : I'll not see them. But I shall see my mission plain. I will preach as I have never preached before. Rage has given me a blistering simplicity.

AARON MEAD : Give it to them, Reverend. I can't see you, but I feel that you are striding uphill to a

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great victory. Pour it over them. Terror is the only guide of true authority. And aim some of the stuff at your nephew Jackie. Tell them to do the right thing by the progressive ideal and give the oppressors a real purgative field-day. To submit to cruelty and death, before a good audience, is the wildest form of combat.

REV. REES : I'll not preach to him. I've had my last word with him. I'm after the conscience of mankind.

AARON MEAD : And you'll find it, too, Reverend. The thing must be about, somewhere.

JACKIE REES : In an outhouse. Bare, no tall windows, no aids to piety like gloss on the benches or an organist in the loft, the lung of reverence, the breath of fear. There'll be no time limit. Indeed, it will be forbidden for you to shut up. Prophets have had their special potency to date because they have been given intervals in which to be silent and admired. But you'll keep on and on to an audience that's truly reached the end of the road, who can no longer be terrified or assuaged. Your rhetoric will be in as many tatters as their tympanum. And they'll see you for what you are, a bombastic clown, a destructive bore. And they will begin to laugh. And that laughter will be your grave, reverend uncle.

GEORGE CHISLETT (*shaking his head doubtfully*) : He's going to be a hard boy to bury, Jackie. After two hours of him I'll be signalling the Dragoons to come and fetch me.

AARON MEAD : He'll be a treat. By the time he's finished you'll have every sin you ever committed walking in front of you, big and slow like camels.

EIRLYS LUXTON (*looking at Resurrection Rees with a new interest and sympathy*) : You will do well,

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Mr. Rees. I'm sure you will. And I shall be listening.

REV. REES : Every note of rage and solace stands ready to be sounded.

AARON MEAD : Every note of rage and solace. That's it. The cutting barb. The healing kiss. The cold slap, the hot stroke. Even without eyes there is delight.

[Jackie's party could at this point go into a little jig based on a pelting adaptation of the hymn "Through the night of doubt and sorrow" which proceeds to exactly the same rhythm as "Every note of rage and solace". The dancers' movements could match the ecstatic lurching of the blind Aaron.]

ALL : More justice now, Jackie. More judgements, boy.

JACKIE REES : Unto each man his most golden fancy.

[He goes to stand in front of the County Sheriff and the Colonel. They both stand stiffly to attention. Aaron Mead, who is alongside Jackie, laughs delightedly.]

AARON MEAD : To hear a man's pride stiffen, that's a good sound. Be arrogant, Sheriff. Make Jackie wild. Make us all vindictive.

[George Chislett hands Aaron a stoup of ale.]

GEORGE CHISLETT : Try holding this between your teeth, Aaron. You are interrupting the court.

JACKIE REES : What is your fancy, Sheriff?

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COUNTY SHERIFF : To see you dangling and the rest of these scamps sweating.

AARON MEAD : Death and toil. Both operate powerfully against mischief. Here's the boy for the tidy life.

GEORGE CHISLETT : His fancy's land. God made the earth in seven days and this joker collared it in eight.

COUNTY SHERIFF : Land goes to him who treats it best.

JACKIE REES : And you saw no wrong in the death from hunger of the people you evicted.

COUNTY SHERIFF : People who are capable of dying from hunger in *any* context are a gross nuisance. Nature flicks them off like midges.

AARON MEAD : That's the thinking I love. Nature. Flick, flick, flick.

[He performs elaborately the gesture of destroying with thumb and flicking finger imaginary insects in his clothes.]

JACKIE REES : Good. You've got death lined up like a co-operative bailiff. We'll give you land. We shall give you as much of this mountain top as you can dig to a depth of six feet. Six feet because that is the customary depth of a grave, and socially you've been something of a sexton.

[The County Sheriff stares straight ahead.]

No protest? No demand for a soldier's death in preference to the degradation of work?

COUNTY SHERIFF : No. Your sentence is a wise one. I have always advocated the thorough turning over of soil as the mark of good husbandry.

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MONA : Your hands will bleed.

COUNTY SHERIFF : And you will tend them, my dear.

MONA : I will indeed.

JACKIE REES (*addressing the Colonel*) : And you are a fighting man, an extended man, an enlarged man. A sword and a horse are to you what the left arm and the right arm are to us. You've won many easy victories, Colonel, and that has given you a very odd opinion of yourself. Your brain has come to fit your saddle. You've hunted people down like vermin. That is a very unwise thing to do because you and the vermin get to accept the truth of this situation. We mustn't coax people into being more stupid or corrupt than they would normally think of being. I'm sure you're a brave man, Colonel. At least I hope so because that's about your only virtue.

ARIANWEN : He'll give you proof.

GEORGE CHISLETT : I thought those girls were supposed to be on our side.

JACKIE REES : Pity . . . a crooked stream. And one's taste in victims changes. We were only truly loved when we were flat on the floor. Now, Colonel, we're giving you a chance to fight, to be brave. Let's talk about odds.

COLONEL : Fix them.

JACKIE REES : I wonder how many of these people you think you're worth? I suppose you could see a thousand of them dead by your hand and feel no alteration for the worse in your own person.

COLONEL : Enemies of the King's peace are not people.

AARON MEAD (*laughing delightedly and going through once more his "flick, flick, flick" routine*) : There it is again. Flick, flick, flick. The

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midges brought to stillness by the fingers of the strong.

JACKIE REES : The King is far from here and we've never known much peace. (*He points towards the yard of the inn.*) Out there, are four men. They are wrestlers. You will fight them one by one. Weapons : hands, feet, head, teeth. No sword, no horse. Up here on this mountain top we've established a kind of fundamentalist society. You can fight as ruthlessly and foully as you please. You can remain what you have set out to be, the Herod of the property-owners, the blood and guts boy.

ARIANWEN : Four against one ! He's had no experience of your kind of mauling. What kind of justice is this ?

JACKIE REES : Slightly better than what he's shown to the gaggles of demonstrators against whom this man (*he points to the County Sheriff*) has unleashed him.

ARIANWEN : He'll show you what courage is.

JACKIE REES : Of course he will. That's his trade. And nobody'll be a jot the better for it. Now let the tasks begin.

[*They all leave the stage except Jackie and Luxton. They ask each other the same question simultaneously.*]

JACKIE REES AND LUXTON : Aren't you going to watch ?

JACKIE REES : No. The judge never watches executions. Otherwise there wouldn't be any executions, would there ?

[*Jackie pours a glass of wine for himself and Luxton. They sit facing each other across the long*

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table, the posture of each of them suggesting that he is sitting on the lip of a familiar nightmare. Jackie rises from the table and opens a window on the left. The voice of Resurrection Rees is heard, and the authority of eagles is in it.]

REV. REES : Behind the granite cliffs of our indifference and treachery lie the green, warm fields of love. We must find them or die. We are rocks. We have lost the way to each other's hearts and until that way be found we betray every fragment of love and effort that went to our making.

[Jackie closes the window.]

JACKIE REES : Good old Resurrection Rees. Game to the last. Do you know something, Mr. Luxton?

LUXTON : If I don't know, this is as good a time as any to find out.

JACKIE REES : If even one heart had been genuinely touched each time the word "love" 's been mentioned, we'd have been out of the wood by now.

LUXTON : Of love I know nothing. I have produced iron. I have produced children. And I am none the wiser. I am a speck of bewilderment. I have lived in storms and I've not known what the hell they've all been about.

[Jackie opens a window on the right. The sound is heard of a man's grunted breath as he drives a spade into earth.]

JACKIE REES : The County Sheriff is shaking hands at last with earth that has no desire to be owned or used.

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[The sound of a man's body landing heavily on the ground to the accompaniment of a cheer.]

The Colonel is finding that for shoulder muscles an iron-worker is the equal of a horse.

[He closes the window and he and Luxton are left once again in silence.]

LUXTON : You're a fool, Jumper.

JACKIE REES : And you, Mr. Luxton.

LUXTON : Agreed. We both escaped. And we both came back.

JACKIE REES : The old mole-run.

[During all this there has been a formless sound from back of stage, the combined susurrations of three audiences.]

LUXTON : You've been a nuisance, Jumper.

JACKIE REES : That's my calling, Mr. Luxton. Unskilled work in the main, but very enjoyable.

LUXTON : It was not so bad when my daughters were as they were, full of contempt for men. It created a kind of coolness around me that might have seen me cosily to the grave. Kept me insulated from the iron and hunger nonsense. Now you've thrown them into the middle of all this fuss. They are stripping their fences down so fast you can hear it all over the county. You've excited them to tropical heights in a context stripped of all the old familiar dampers. If you could have been the boy who got the emotional bonus it wouldn't have been so bad. But you've got them fascinated by the virtues of three men whose confessed intention is to bore or frighten me to death.

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[A third of the background sound drops into silence. Luxton's head shoots up as if he has noticed this. Jackie pays no attention. The second third of the sound falls still.]

You'll be left alone, you know.

JACKIE REES : What's that?

LUXTON : You'll be left alone.

[The last of the sound dies away.]

Did you know that? Did you know that the fall of evening might bring the fall of hope, that once they saw that little circus of vindication out there they might slink away and leave you alone?

JACKIE REES : Oh! yes, yes. I knew that. Whenever you lead people against any citadel that's been whacking them over the head, it's just a trial run. Wanting to know how the legs will feel when they start in a new direction. And remember they've been whacked. They don't see too far, too clearly. Their legs are twisted and their feet are fearful. They have been made to stand in postures that are less than human.

LUXTON : And you'll be left alone.

JACKIE REES : Why not? Other people tear your arms out. But they are nourished on the memory of the man they dismembered. All the way along the road, the unburied dead trying to explain and warn. I've made two mistakes, Mr. Luxton. One, never having looked hard enough for a woman who could dominate me, shape me, kill me.

LUXTON : And the second?

JACKIE REES : Having tried to interpret the dreams of people who didn't even know they were asleep.

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[The laughter of Aaron Mead is heard. He opens the door and leans on the jamb as if worn out by his spell of merriment.]

When this boy laughs, duck. What's up, Aaron?

AARON MEAD : I'm out in the dark, Jackie, but I could walk the earth by the light of these fine, burning jests.

JACKIE REES : Go on. Tell me. I've set jokes going. What made them jump?

[The door is flung open. The whole crowd of workers flood in led by Richie Rees. His eyes are blazing. His clothes are disarrayed. He laughs as he sees the pensive bitterness. Luxton's first daughter is at his side, radiant.]

REV. REES : What made them jump? I did. I was tremendous. The sun and the moon swung from my every word. I was riding love to hounds. Then some heat, some intimation of climax flowed out to me from the listening people. I stopped talking. I held my hands out to the congregation. I started to cry. Then I said, "I will speak no more. I will stand here weeping until the core of flint in every human heart has been melted away."

JACKIE REES : A fair tactic. Save on the words.

REV. REES : Oh ! the shuddering of miracles. The walls of petrified restraint that are tumbling to nothing in my heart. Before this I was seeing only the heel of humanity, the fleeting heel of humanity. I am being liberated into the light as you are being lowered into the dark, Jackie. The light. And the first shaft had to be this. To ravish your little kingdom of confident licence, to inherit some part of your bold and laughing confidence. There is only

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one mistake, to operate on only one level. By the minute I am growing. See me now, my votaries around me in a tight cluster of caressive zeal. I timed this whole thing better than you did, Jackie. Shrink now and be still. Now, children, down into the valley, to the new freedom.

[Richie Rees and his votaries tramp out singing one of the gayer hymns used before.]

LUXTON : You've started something, Jumper.

AARON MEAD : He's finished something. Some of Rees's zealots knocked up a little gibbet for you, Jackie, before they left. Kind of keepsake.

JACKIE REES : And the County Sheriff?

AARON MEAD : He dug like a mole. A surprisingly good hand with the shovel. Your second daughter was at the side of the hole. Her body kept time with the spade.

LUXTON : Bright girls, they were, my daughters. But the mind is a smudge, Jumper, no more.

AARON MEAD : You must have heard his shout when his tool hit the metal.

JACKIE REES : Metal? What's this now?

AARON MEAD : You know there was once an abbey where this pub now stands.

JACKIE REES : These holy ghosts are everywhere.

AARON MEAD : A thousand years ago, the Danes or some other plundering pack came lurching this way. The monks dug a rough hole and buried their treasures before heading west. The County Sheriff found the very spot. He distributed the gold and silver pots among the people. They followed him and your second daughter back down to the valley.

JACKIE REES : And the Colonel? Go on, tell me. The wrestlers had strokes.

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AARON MEAD : No. It seems the Colonel is an expert at some French type of wrestling in which the knee-cap is driven with passionate force into the opponent's crotch. He had the four wrestlers writhing on the floor in as many minutes. And your third daughter was practically keeping them company, Mr. Luxton. Do you hear that?

JACKIE REES : I hear nothing.

AARON MEAD : The soldiers are climbing the mountain. I can't see, but I know that their helmets, their horses, their lances are coming into view all round the skyline. They are spurring their horses into a gallop. They are coming for you, Jackie.

[Jackie flings the door open.]

Die well, Jackie.

[Luxton takes off his top coat and throws it to Jackie, who takes it.]

Die well, Jackie.

LUXTON : Run hard, Jumper.

Softly the hooves of many horses are heard. Softly, too, the choral theme of "Hail to the Lord's Anointed". Jackie smiles at Luxton and at Aaron Mead. He slips Luxton's coat over his shoulder and walks out into the twilight.

Curtain

A CHEAP BUNCH
OF NICE FLOWERS

by

EDNA O'BRIEN

© *Edna O'Brien 1963*

All applications by professionals and amateurs for permission to perform this play must be made to Christopher Mann Ltd., 140 Park Lane, London, W.1.

Michael Codron and William Donaldson presented
A Cheap Bunch of Nice Flowers at the New Arts
Theatre, London, on November 20, 1962, with the
following cast :

WINIFRED HENNESSEY	<i>Eithne Dunne</i>
RIA HENNESSEY	<i>Susannah York</i>
CHARLOTTE RUSSE	<i>Marie Kean</i>
THE PROFESSOR	<i>Reginald Barratt</i>
BUDD CONNOR	<i>Ray McAnally</i>
SHONEEN TRACY	<i>Declan Harvey</i>

Directed by Desmond T. O'Donovan

Setting and lighting by Brian Currah

CHARACTERS

WINIFRED HENNESSEY

RIA HENNESSEY

CHARLOTTE RUSSE

THE PROFESSOR

MADELINE BOYD

BUDD CONNOR

SHONEEN TRACY

FIDDLER

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The action takes place in the home of Winifred Hennessey in Dublin.

ACT ONE

March.

ACT TWO

May.

ACT THREE

August.

ACT ONE

A melody is heard played upon a fiddle. It is a rather bad rendering of "Danny Boy". The curtain rises.

Before us is a living-room in a crumbling Dublin house. Winifred Hennessey, a woman in her forties, is seated on a rocking chair, reading. She takes two cigarettes from a packet, puts one in her mouth, the other behind her ear. She picks up a box of matches and strikes a match on the sole of her shoe. She is wearing a tweed skirt, a woollen jumper and has another jumper thrown over her shoulders and knotted by the sleeves under her chin. It is the month of March. There is a fire in the grate, a bag of turf beside it. She is nursing a rubber hot-water bottle on her lap.

Gradually she becomes aware of the music and stands up to look for sixpence. The music stops. There is a knock on the door.

WINIFRED : All right. I hear you. (*She searches in her handbag, in the pocket of her coat which is hanging on the back of the door, in a jug on the mantelshelf; finally in a finger of her gloves she feels a coin, takes it out and goes to door. She opens door to street.*)

FIDDLER (*offstage*) : Grand day . . . Mam.

WINIFRED (*still nursing the rubber hot-water bottle*) : It's freezing. (*Handing him the money.*) There you are.

FIDDLER : God bless you. Oh, it's a grand day . . . we'll pay for this weather yet, we will. I saw the first daffydills today. I don't know what it is about daffydills but they always remind me of the spring.

ACT ONE

WINIFRED (*sarcastic voice*) : Do they? (*She moves as if to close door.*)

FIDDLER : I'm too late for the tea, I suppose.

WINIFRED : You are.

FIDDLER : Well, I better be off . . . so. See you next Monday.

WINIFRED (*closes the door and sighs*) : See you next Monday ! Daffodils remind *him* of the spring. (*She listens.*) Suppose he's off now, never occur to him to play after he gets his sixpence. He's an atrocious fiddler anyhow. I pay him to go away.

[*She returns to the rocking chair, picks up a paperback book, and opens it at random. Around her are books on home-made shelves and in orange boxes; kittens in a basket, a typewriter, chewed rugs, bottles of home-made wine lying on their sides, a table half-laid since the previous meal, some broken chairs and an old-fashioned sofa. There is a noticeable pile of empty beer bottles in one corner of the room.*

Enter Ria, her daughter, a dark-haired girl of about twenty. She is wearing a smart, fitted coat, a ridiculous hat, and a pair of dark glasses, and carrying a walking umbrella. The cuckoo clock strikes.

RIA : Ma. Ma. (*She looks around but cannot see her mother because of the dark glasses. She says to the cuckoo clock:*) Oh, shut up, it's only me.

WINIFRED : You tryin' to look like a spy or something?

RIA (*turning on her heel, walks towards the door as if she is going to leave again and says in a fanciful voice*) : Hello. Good-bye.

[*Having got to the door, she takes off her coat, hangs it on the hook on the back of the door which is already laden down with coats, caps, aprons, etc.*]

If anyone asks me what I want for Christmas I'll say a hallstand. Oh, by the way, I better tell you I've ordered some mobiles . . . there's going to be a pegasus hanging there. Always moving and fluttering . . .

WINIFRED : Order a consignment of rubber cushions. I get a pain no matter what way I sit.

RIA : *Your slippers!* (*Looks at her mother's slippers, then proceeds to take off one of her shoes.*) Wait till I tell you, I took these to be mended to that place in Harcourt Street that says "Repairs in four hours." "Ah," says the man, "We'd need a week's notice for a job like that."

WINIFRED : Private enterprise. Leave them there and I'll mend them . . . there's a last somewhere.

RIA (*moving around*) : Whatya readin'? Thrillers or culture?

[*Winifred looks at cover of book which she has been holding in her hand.*]

WINIFRED : F. Scott Fitzgerald.

RIA (*taking off her hat*) : Oh, I'd lunch with him the other day.

WINIFRED : He's dead for the last twenty-two years.

RIA : What's for lunch?

WINIFRED : I was out, we'll rustle up something. Omelette or something.

RIA : You know I can't stand eggs.

WINIFRED : Would you like a banana spread on bread?

RIA : No. I wouldn't like a banana spread on bread.

ACT ONE

WINIFRED : Would you like a knife in your back?

[*Pause.*]

Ria turns back to her mother, takes off her rings, places them on one of the holy statues that are along the mantelshelf. There are seven statues in all, each with a part missing. She swivels the loose head of a saint around so that the face is frontwise again.]

WINIFRED : Is today the Feast of the Blessed Virgin?

RIA : A lot you'd care.

WINIFRED : Well, is it?

RIA : Why?

WINIFRED : 'Cause you're wearing blue underwear.

RIA : Jesus wept. Coarse words and whiskey. That's her idea of livin'. (*Puts her hands to her hair and ruffles it.*) Oh, God, let's have Scott Fitzgerald for lunch.

WINIFRED : He wouldn't like you. He liked wild girls. She's dried up, a virgin. Worms will get her yet, if Shoneen doesn't. The boy-friend : neutered of course.

RIA : *I'm wild.* (*Crossing the room, she stumbles over a chair, being unable to see with her glasses.*)

WINIFRED : Take your glasses off before you break something.

RIA (*affected accent*) : Can't. Doctor says it's absolutely vital, something to do with mutation and my irises.

[*Pause.*]

I am wild.

WINIFRED : Since when?

A CHEAP BUNCH OF NICE FLOWERS

RIA : I lost my honour months ago . . . years.

WINIFRED : Who was the lucky man?

RIA : I don't know, he was a stranger . . . a baron in his own right. Don't tell Shoneen though, he'd be livid.

WINIFRED (*mocking*) : He would.

RIA (*touching the statues*) : He says you behead these on purpose. He says next time he's going to give you a wrought iron one. He's having himself psychoanalysed.

WINIFRED : A correspondence course?

RIA : No, Father Savage.

WINIFRED : A priest can't be a psychoanalyst.

RIA : Father Savage is the best in Europe. He has all sorts of degrees. Shoneen says they argue about theology and the classics and everything. Shoneen says next time we're having a dinner party we ought to ask Father Savage in order to keep the conversation flashing.

[*Even Ria realizes how absurd this is and together they laugh. Winifred picks up a white jug off mantelshelf, holds it out and says:*]

WINIFRED : Dinner party! We're broke! (*in the voice of a Dublin beggar-woman*) Penny for a poor aul woman.

[*Pause.*]

I wonder what he does for Shoneen? Tell him why he comes here every Sunday for eleven years and has tea and ham. (*mimicking Shoneen's voice*) "Could I have another drop of tea, Mrs. Hennessey, just a spout?" (*usual voice*) Just a spout! He won't even squeeze that damn mustard out of that

ACT ONE

tube, thinks it's indecent to see the mustard coming out of the tube.

RIA : You know what he wants to do now?

WINIFRED : Ban mustard in tubes?

RIA (*pointing to the bottles in the corner*) : Put a little altar there, a May altar.

WINIFRED (*chanting*) : Down with May altars. (*Shadow-boxes with the statue.*)

RIA (*chanting*) : Up the workers. (*Points to pictures of James Connelly and Lenin.*) Incidentally, I sat next to a man in the bus today and he was reading your article. "She's my mother," said I, and he wouldn't believe me.

WINIFRED : I'm not surprised. Who'd think she had a mother?

RIA : I wish you wouldn't write about dreary politics. I wish you'd interview stars.

WINIFRED : I'm interviewing some pot-bellies this evening.

RIA (*looking at her mother through dark glasses*) : You know, you look almost bearable through these lenses . . . they give you a yellow-green complexion as if you were composed of lemon juice, instead of blood. I hate being composed of blood. I resent it. I really do. It's so carniferous.

WINIFRED : That's what I get for educating you and putting you through college . . . illiteracy. Give me an educated man or woman or a totally primitive mind. It's the in-betweens I can't stand. When I was your age . . .

RIA : We know. We know. We heard it all before. When you were my age you were dying for Ireland, and devouring all the men you knew in the process.

[*Ria goes over and turns on the radio so as to drown*

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her mother's voice. There is loud Ceilidh music being played. Instantly Winifred goes over and turns it off.]

RIA : Can I go to the park with you this evening?

WINIFRED : Who said I was going to the park?

RIA : I was looking for a safety pin and saw it written in your diary.

WINIFRED : A safety pin?

RIA : Who's the party for, anyhow?

WINIFRED (*rising with some difficulty and making a face as if in pain*) : Our leaders are foregathering . . . in their hand-made boots. And I am there to say to Messrs. Sean Emmett, Mac Hagerty and Co., "Now tell me sir, as a minister of what's-what how do you feel about the price of butter" . . .

RIA : It's gone up.

WINIFRED : And while we're at it, how do you feel about bleeding the peasants of Ireland.

RIA : This country is all right. We've an airport and a cinder track for runners.

WINIFRED : Bravery. Pensions. Graft. Bullet wounds are like woodworm . . . easy to fake.

[Ria has taken off her dark glasses and has been sucking the tip of the frame.]

RIA : Ma, do you ever wish the frames of your glasses were flavoured?

WINIFRED (*impatiently*) : Were what?

RIA : Flavoured. You know . . . vanilla or coffee or whatever flavour you fancy. (*Pause.*) Can I come with you this evening? I got a new hat.

WINIFRED : You know you can't.

RIA : Budd Connor is going with you.

WINIFRED : You must look for a lot of safety pins.

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RIA : Is he back from London?

WINIFRED : Today.

RIA : You'd think you'd be ashamed of yourself, an elderly woman like you being seen out with a marvellous, handsome man like that. He's so long. (*Holds one hand up, palm downwards, facing the other palm, and draws them apart to indicate his length.*)

WINIFRED : Set the table, will you?

RIA (*putting on her glasses*) : Why should I? I'm a secretary, not a skivvy, and one day I am going to be a glassblower. I am going to conceive and make beautiful things out of glass, long windows . . . of blue glass.

WINIFRED : Conceive and make . . . an egg.

RIA : Where did you go this morning?

WINIFRED (*frowning as if she had just recalled something awful*) : To the doctor.

RIA (*enumerating with her fingers*) : Hair one day. Dentist the next. The doctor today. You're like a kept woman. How's your gallstones?

WINIFRED (*making sour face*) : Calling . . . get me a lunch.

RIA : Where's Charlotte Russe?

WINIFRED : I don't know. She went upstairs to make the beds before I went out. Call her.

[*Ria goes to door leading to stairs and calls:*]

RIA : Char. Char.

[*There is no answer, but we hear a thud upstairs as if something has been dropped.*]

WINIFRED : Our stately home is falling in. Call her again.

RIA : Charlotte.

[*There is no answer.*]

(*to her mother*) She won't answer.

WINIFRED : You know bloody well she won't answer to that.

RIA : Charlotte Russe.

[*A woman's voice is heard offstage.*]

What are you doing?

[*Pause.*]

She's fittin' on clothes. Jesus. (*Taking off her dark glasses, she lays them on table, then runs towards stairs.*) If she touches that dress I have for the park I'll brain her.

[*Ria exits.*]

WINIFRED : A baron in his own right. (*Looks at cuckoo clock which is cuckooing again.*) Are you suffering from the change of life too? (*She takes a cigarette and lights it, then puts another behind her ear. She stands very still for a minute drawing on the cigarette as if it gave her immense pleasure. She then looks down at her body, unknots sleeves of the jumper and says:*) Don't let me down. (*Laying the table then, she sniffs from a milk jug.*) Sour. I always said we were better off with no milk jug, at least we knew where we were. It wouldn't do. She had to have a milk jug and a tea strainer. (*Holds it up.*)

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[*Ria and Charlotte enter, squabbling.*]

RIA : My good dress on her.

WINIFRED (*to Charlotte*) : Where's the stew you were to make?

[*Charlotte is an elderly woman dressed in a long, steelish dance dress, a long necklace and a chiffon scarf.*]

CHARLOTTE (*through her nose*) : Couldn't find it.

WINIFRED : Stop talking through your nose. Where is it? I suppose you ran down to Dolores with the plate of chops soon as my back was turned. It wouldn't be the first time.

CHARLOTTE (*gets very offended and puts on her houghty-toighty face. Says, not through her nose*) : I'm off—accusin' me of a thing like that. My daughter Dolores is a respectably married woman and has a respectable husband and respectable children and enough to eat, not like *some* people. I'm giving my notice. (*She pretends to be trying to take off the necklace.*) Now.

WINIFRED (*pointing to the door*) : Go on.

CHARLOTTE (*through her nose*) : Oh, Mrs. Hennessey, don't give out to me, it's not right. All I was doing was lookin' at a few dresses and fittin' them on to cheer myself up on this cold, lugubrious day. You owe me a fortune in wages.

WINIFRED : Run out and tell the whole street. And I'll be behind you telling them how I've asked you to leave this house time and time again. You're a liability to me and nothing more.

RIA (*as if making a speech*) : We'll have our lunch first and a row later. This house! The rows this house has known. Knives shivering in the walls.

These chairs—(*she picks up a broken chair*) if they could talk they'd tell a story; first between me mother and her men friends, then between me mother and me, then that pair. (*Nods to Charlotte, who is sniffing.*) Always me mother though, always. A man came to the door one day selling glasses and within sixty seconds she was arguing with him. About immorality and profit.

CHARLOTTE : Was that the man with the hole in his pants?

[*Ria remembers her dark glasses, puts them on. Charlotte is speechless with admiration.*]

Aren't they sumptuous? Let me look through them. (*She grabs the glasses and puts them on.*) Good God, everything is green. (*pointing to Winifred*) You're green. (*Feels table.*) And the cloth is green, and . . .

WINIFRED (*hustling her with the corner of the bread board*) : Come on, lay the table. A lot of use telling you about the distribution of labour.

CHARLOTTE (*suddenly getting very helpful, tries to humour Winifred*) : They say there's going to be a war, is that true?

RIA : There is one. Fifteen men killed in the Congo. Five of them from Dublin. Nuns slaughtered, their ears cut off and everything. 'Tis in the paper.

WINIFRED : Oh, Jesus Christ, young people dying and not even knowing what they're dying for.

CHARLOTTE (*removing glasses and banging her fist on the table*) : I knew it! That's why thou'll oranges now are all blood. There's where oranges come from, the Congo. Passin' the pillar yesterday and Daisy, that wan I was tellin' you about (*to Ria*) that made the novena and got her aunt, she says to

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me, "Would you care for a blood orange, Charlotte?" Terrible crude altogether.

WINIFRED : They volunteer to go out there so they can save enough money to marry some trollop.

RIA : Don't look at me.

CHARLOTTE : A man threw himself off Nelson's Pillar wan day, he owed money, and when she saw him landin' down she yells out, "Straight into my barrow." Imagine dyin' in a black country like that.

WINIFRED (*bitterly*) : The best people I've ever known are dead.

CHARLOTTE : They died for their country. Comrades; warriors. (*to Winifred*) Your father and all belongin' to you died for Ireland. (*tenderly*) Say that lovely speech about bullets like rain and public lavatories. (*through her nose*) Go on.

[*Winifred says nothing.*]

RIA (*joining her hands*) : Thanks be to God, she's forgotten it.

WINIFRED (*suddenly*) : Forgotten ! In other countries there was a revolution . . .

RIA : She's off.

WINIFRED : Here there was only death and murder. We changed masters, painted the buses green, and blazoned "Fir and Mna" across the public lavatories—Ladies and Gents. My father died for Fir and Mna and my brother got killed so that we'd have to go to Mass.

RIA : Don't start that. I'm sick of patriotism. (*Recites as she holds up a cottage loaf:*)

Some have died for love
And some for the nation
But I met my death
Through the Dublin Corporation,

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Sure as God I nearly fell in a man-hole the other day where they were diggin' for rats. "I nearly fell in," says I. "Oh, darling there's nothing I could do, but fall in on top of you," said the fella who was digging.

CHARLOTTE (*through her nose*): You could sue.

RIA (*sings*):

Sue Siddie Sue

The last time that I stole a kiss

I found him stealing two . . .

(*speech*) Strangers remark on my lips. Vermilion, they say.

WINIFRED: Yes, Ria, you have very extraordinary-coloured lips. They're a kind of (*peering at them*) red.

RIA (*to the loaf of bread in her hand*): Oh, God, bread. I hate bread. (*Drops it.*) Why didn't someone make toast?

WINIFRED: Parasite. In Asia people are lucky if they get half a cup of rice a day.

RIA: Asia's where they have bird's nest soup. That's what I'd like; bird's nest soup and oysters and a de-luxe cruise of Egypt. Egyptian Nights.

WINIFRED: Jesus, she gets more vulgar every day.

RIA (*pretending that it was Charlotte who was meant*): She does. Char, this is how you drink tea.

[*Ria holds cup daintily and curls little finger out. Charlotte is pouring tea on to her saucer to cool some. She has spilt some.*]

WINIFRED: I think I'll go to bed and stay there.

RIA: "Give my love to the pilchards," someone said to me once when we were going to the seaside. He said "Give my love to the pilchards." (*to Charlotte*)

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Don't you think that's the wittiest thing you ever heard a human being say? Sophisticated.

[*Pause.*]

Char, there's going to be a pegasus hanging right there, moving and fluttering.

CHARLOTTE (*looking baffled*): It's not white mice, is it? One thing I hope it's not, and that's white mice. (*curling up*) Oh!

[*Silence while they chew.*]

(*to Winifred*) Were you at the doctor?

WINIFRED: You know I was.

RIA: God, you must be developing a crush on him. I know the days to lock up my toilet water.

CHARLOTTE: Did you ask him for any of those green pills, green pills for blood?

RIA: Ma, do you know those . . .

[*Suddenly the doorbell is rung. Charlotte rises to answer it.*]

WINIFRED (*vehemently*): Don't answer it.

CHARLOTTE: Who is it?

[*Three more rings.*]

RIA: The Professor. Wouldn't you know it?

WINIFRED: Once he gets his foot in the door he'll be here for a week. I'm going to get that bell disconnected.

RIA: Very likely! Budd Connor due any minute.

[*Door bell again.*]

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WINIFRED : Don't answer it.

RIA : Commissar. If she said let's have the blanc-mange first and the dinner later that's how it would be.

WINIFRED : Shut up.

[Winifred peels banana and slices it with carving knife on to her bread. Doorbell again, and then silence until a small girl of ten or eleven, named Madeline Boyd, comes to back window which looks out on backyard. The window is slightly raised—so that the cats can go in and out—and is held up with a scrubbing brush because the window cord is broken. The girl taps at window and beams in at them. Then she stoops down and yells through the opening.]

MADELINE : Are you in, Mrs. Hennessey?

[Winifred instantly covers her head with a newspaper. Ria puts on her dark glasses and Charlotte puts a tea-cosy on her head.]

Are you in, Mrs. Hennessey? The Professor is at the front door trying to get in for the last ten minutes. He asked me to give you a shout . . .

WINIFRED : No, I'm not in.

MADELINE *(roaring with a sort of mad, ginnel laughter)* : Oh, but you are in, Mrs. Hennessey, I can see you.

WINIFRED : Go away.

MADELINE : Mrs. Hennessey. *(Madeline raises up window so that she can be heard more distinctly, yells:)* Peep! *(Then she lets the scrubbing brush fall and drops the window with a fierce thud.)*

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WINIFRED (*jumping up to see if Madeline has harmed herself*): Jesus.

RIA (*taking off her glasses*): Did somebody drop a pin?

CHARLOTTE: They'll sue, she's learning the piano, that wan.

[*Ria goes to the front door to let the Professor in. Madeline has fled.*]

WINIFRED: I don't know how he does it, but he times it always for lunch. (*Hands Charlotte a jar of chicken and ham paste which is on table.*) And these. (*A bag of tomatoes.*)

CHARLOTTE (*through her nose*): I'll never forget that pheasant you cooked for Budd Connor's birthday. Was it in wine or what?

[*Pause.*]

(*not through her nose*) What did the doctor say?

WINIFRED: He said, "Take off your clothes, Mrs. Hennessey."

[*Pause.*]

CHARLOTTE: How's your insides?

WINIFRED: Bad.

[*Ria returns followed by an old man, nicknamed the Professor because of his apparent devotion to knowledge. Madeline follows behind, skipping on a new, white skipping rope.*]

PROFESSOR: Winifred, I just happened to be passing by. (*He shakes hands with Winifred who ex-*

tends no welcome at all.) And I popped in. (*Looks around the room.*) Chilly, isn't it? Chilly. Standing out there, waiting . . .

[*The Professor sits down at tea-table and Madeline brings over a stool and sits too.*]

WINIFRED : This is like a soup kitchen. (*to Charlotte*) Get him a cup.

CHARLOTTE : I'd rather not.

PROFESSOR (*in a piqued voice*) : Oh, well, if it's a question of your being too busy, Winifred . . .

RIA : She's going to the President's house at Phoenix Park this evening . . .

PROFESSOR (*interrupting*) : Ria, I want you to type a letter for me to the County Council, it's about the lime trees on the Donnybrook road, they're pulling them down. The British planted all those lovely trees and now our own nincompoops . . .

CHARLOTTE : Get a cup for a man like that. He's a Protestant. I don't like Protestants. They never eat between meals.

WINIFRED : Hurry on. I have to go to this cocktail party at five . . .

MADELINE (*in a surprised voice*) : Cock tail. Cock tail.

RIA (*pointing to the Professor who is smothering his face in a grubby, off-white handkerchief*) : He's not a real Protestant. All he's doing is pretending to be one so that he has a nice place to live in and enough to eat; he couldn't get into a Catholic home and even if he did it would be an institution. Ma. (*softening her voice as if she wanted to make peace with her mother*) that's what we ought to become—Protestants.

CHARLOTTE (*passionately*) : Listen to that, after we

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fightin' for our freedom for nine hundred years and look what you're sayin'. A heathen. Priests had to say mass out in fields until we fought. (*Picks up carving knife and threatens Ria with it.*)

WINIFRED (*in a tired voice*): Charlotte, put that knife down. Behave yourself. Ria, go upstairs and make the beds.

RIA: I want to read my horoscope.

WINIFRED (*to Charlotte*): Get a cup and a mug for that one. (*Nods to Madeline.*)

MADELINE: You're awful good, Mrs. Hennessey.

PROFESSOR: Tell, me, Winifred, what is your appraisal of things in the Congo? I came up this morning specially . . .

[*Winifred ignores him, goes and gets kettle of hot water from the fire and adds a little hot water to the rubber bottle which she has been holding in her hand.*]

CHARLOTTE (*with emotion*): Imagine it. Nice, Catholic boys dying for blacks. Payin' a shilling for black babies is wan thing but dyin' for blacks is a different kettle of fish altogether.

PROFESSOR (*wagging his finger at her*): Now, now, nothing reactionary here, I always say where would you be on the piano if you had all white notes and no black notes. Am I right, Winifred?

WINIFRED: You're like the rest of us, you're full of wind and piss. There was a time when people in this country were *doing* things. (*to Ria*) Young people today worry about their horoscopes.

PROFESSOR (*determined not to be insulted by her*): You've got something there, Winifred, you've always got a point somewhere.

MADELINE (*who has been reading horoscope over*

Ria's shoulder) : It's a good day for me, for investment.

PROFESSOR : Can I stay for the week-end, Winifred?

WINIFRED : What week-end? This is Wednesday.

PROFESSOR : Until Monday. I want to think. Can't think in that place, too rowdy. There's something brewing (*taps his head*) in here. You remember those golf balls I told you about, that glow when they're lost? Well, they're still looming in my head, and that substance to keep pianos dry. We could make a fortune, Winifred. You could give free food to every man, woman and child in Dublin.

RIA : Ma, do you know those bombs you're always talking about?

WINIFRED : You mean those bombs that are always talking to me?

RIA : Yeh. I have this marvellous idea, just came to me this instant. (*breathless with surprise*) I suppose that's how inventions come to people, and poems. You say there won't be any of us left in ten years.

[*Winifred sighs to the ceiling.*]

So, why don't we get a whole load of stuff *now* on the never-never? (*Throws out her arms in an extravagant gesture.*) We could get a big, big house with tennis courts and peacocks . . .

WINIFRED (*nods to wine bottles*) : And a wine cellar.

MADELINE : I'd like a bike.

CHARLOTTE : Someone has to clean up after peacocks. I saw them at the Zoo, misbehaving.

WINIFRED : And plenty of passages so that we'd meet as seldom as possible.

RIA (*to the Professor*) : You could live in the barn.

WINIFRED : Sssh . . . sssh. (*She cocks her ear towards the door.*)

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RIA : Budd !

[Ria quickly puts on her shoes and her dark glasses. Winifred runs her hand through her hair in preparation.]

[Offstage we hear Budd's voice singing a mock-chant . . .]

BUDD (*offstage*) :

O Deus ego amo te,
nec amo te ut salves me,
Aut qua non amantes te,
Aeterno punes igne.

[Ria rushes towards door, saying to Winifred:]

RIA : It's all right, I'll answer it. You're not supposed to be exerting yourself with your varicose veins.

MADELINE (*to Charlotte*) : Do you ever get the lock-jaw now?

[Enter Budd Connor, a tall, blond, handsome man of about thirty-five. He is waving a whisky bottle and appears to be rather drunk.]

BUDD : God Save all here. Never miss a day of saying my Act of Contrition in Latin. A person of cautionary tendency, that's me . . . you know what the man said about twin beds, it's not the walk over but the drag back. (*Raises his hand.*) Winifred, hail.

RIA : Budd, you're back, that's smashing. (*She puts on her ring and charm bracelet.*)

BUDD (*passing Ria, he strokes her cheek, as he goes*

over to Winifred and kisses her) : I got off the boat, tired, cold and hungry and I came to see you first thing. Now what do you think of that, Mother Macree? (*Stands back from her.*) How are you?—you're worried-looking.

RIA (*shaping around in her dark glasses*) : Budd, had you a nice holiday? What's London like?

BUDD (*still with his hand under Winifred's chin, holding it up*) : I must tell you all something—I have a very urgent and confidential piece of news. I know why the Queen of England won't give Scotland its freedom.

[*Pause while they await his reply.*]

Because she doesn't love her mother.

[*Winifred laughs, all the others look puzzled.*]

BUDD (*to Winifred*) : Never mind. They'll learn.

WINIFRED : Have a cup of tea. (*Takes his hand as she steers him across to the table.*) You're perished.

[*Ria flicks crumbs off the table as she sets a place down for Budd.*]

RIA (*in his ear*) : Did you get me the message?

BUDD (*raising the half empty whisky bottle and addressing Winifred*) : London is great. They're changing guards at Buckingham Palace, Christopher Robin is down in Alice.

RIA : Where are your kids, Budd?

BUDD : Oh, they're tip-top, tip-top, safe and sound. They're with their auntie Josephine. The meanest and most frigid bitch in the thirty-two counties of Ireland.

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CHARLOTTE (*to Professor*): He must be made of lead, that wan. Four young childer and no mother for them. His wife killin' herself, she didn't do that for nothing. Young children mindin' one another, it's not right.

[*Madeline has her ear cocked for this piece of news and Charlotte gives her a clout with a folded newspaper.*]

(*to Madeline*) Mind your own business. (*to Professor*) They haven't a coat between them . . . only plastic mackintoshes.

WINIFRED: I said you could leave them here. How many times have I to tell you?

CHARLOTTE: You won't see me here if they come. I'll be off . . .

[*Budd sings over her speech:*]

BUDD: Hush-a-by baby
 The cradle is green,
 Father's a nobleman
 Mother's a . . .

(*He stops suddenly, looks about.*) Food. (*He sits at table and helps himself to bread and butter.*)

[*Winifred takes out tomatoes and ham paste, etc., which she hid when the professor came in. Madeline reaches out and snaps a tomato, the professor reads the label on the paste jar as if it were of great interest.*]

CHARLOTTE (*to Professor*): When his missus went downtown to that hotel and threw herself out the

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window, d'you know what he said? He said it was her way of showing that she loved him.

[Winifred adds more hot water to the rubber bottle and sits on couch, nursing it to her stomach.]

BUDD : What's that for?

WINIFRED : Oh, I don't know. Pain. Cold.

RIA *(to Winifred)* : Are you doin' your act again?

WINIFRED : Yes, Ria, thanks for noticing. I'm doing my act again.

MADELINE *(to Charlotte)* : Did your mouth stay open for long? *(Opens her mouth.)* Like that?

RIA : Budd. *(Pause.)* My hair is red underneath, did you know that?

BUDD : I didn't.

RIA : Yes, that's what the hairdresser said to me, he said, "You've got a gorgeous pile of auburn hair underneath that mop." *(She lifts mane of hair and walks around with it held up.)* Do you think it would be wise for me to marry a Greek boy who is in love with me?

WINIFRED : Infinitely.

CHARLOTTE *(to Professor)* : He was going to be a priest once. They're never right after that.

WINIFRED : Tell me about London, Budd. What did you do?

RIA : See any X films?

BUDD *(sings)* : What did I see

I saw the sea . . .

(speech) I meant to, but I never got there. An important thing always detained me. In my humble opinion all culture is a waste of drinkin' time. Ah—*(as if he suddenly came out of a drunken haze)* I did see something, something very, very significant. A film. In the Charing Cross Road. 'Twas set in

ACT ONE

this nudist colony, you see, and it opens up with one young girl going down there for the week-end and then she comes back to London—(*to Winifred*) You don't just see their backs, you see everything except what their hands conceal, and she meets a boy in London and she says "you ought to come down to this nudist colony," so, the next week-end he does. Then they both come back to London and they meet two more people and they say "You ought to come down to this nudist colony with us," so four people set out. They *all* come back to London and they meet more . . .

WINIFRED : There's a fine plot for you.

BUDD : Yes, Winifred, but what I was thinkin' was, if this sort of thing went on, after a certain length of time the whole population of London would be nude. (*Getting excited.*) Think of it. Think of being in the Underground at half-five going home to Stockwell. Everyone jammed in together . . . naked. Ah, the poor, worn, washed-out women of London, they'd get a bit of sex then, piled in th'underground, close to the men. Because I'll tell you, I made an important discovery about Englishmen, very nice and polite and have a collar and tie and all that. (*Nudges the Professor.*) For the sake of the ladies, I'll just say a great percentage of Englishmen are not men, if you know what I mean.

CHARLOTTE : In the war in London there was tons of sex down th'air raid shelters. A priest told me. A terrible country.

RIA (*dances over to Budd*) : My hips are going wild, do you mind?

BUDD (*to Winifred*) : What will we do about Ria's hips?

WINIFRED : Put her into her roll-'em-ups. The gentle hug of her roll-'em-ups will keep her steady.

RIA : Listen to who's talking. You wear a corset too, a great big steel thing, encasing you.

CHARLOTTE (*to Madeline*) : This is no place for a child.

[*Madeline stands up and starts skipping. Charlotte protects the statues from the skipping rope.*]

RIA : Did a registered parcel come for me today? There's some Queen Bee Jelly I ordered.

BUDD (*pouring some whiskey*) : Here, Queen Bee, have a drink. (*Is about to give the whiskey he has poured into a cup, but then remembers Winifred and serves Winifred with first drink.*) Here, Winifred, here, child, the grey juice of the barley will see us through the night.

[*The Professor holds out his tea-cup.*]

PROFESSOR : Is it Bushmells? I know a good whiskey when I see it. I think I caught pneumonia standing out there waiting.

[*Budd pours some whiskey into the Professor's cup, and then Charlotte holds out a tablespoon on to which he pours some.*]

CHARLOTTE : Medicinal.

RIA (*who has been offered none*) : I was in a Lounge Bar once with about ten men and I drank them under the table. I mixed my drinks too.

[*Madeline comes across and looking at Budd says:*]

MADELINE : Do you know Jack Spratt?

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[Budd looks at her as he looks at all women and together they recite as they skip:]

MADELINE } (together):
BUDD }

Jack Spratt could eat no fat
His wife could eat no lean,
And so, between them both, you see,
They licked the platter clean.

[Budd, panting, throws himself on the sofa beside Winifred.]

BUDD: I'm exhausted. Up all night on that boat and my dinner swimmin' around. Everyone's dinner all over the place . . . it's funny how you can take a record of everything a man's eaten for the previous three meals, if you're on the same boat as him.

RIA: Does anyone know if the snow melts on the Alps in the summertime? I hope it doesn't, because I want to see it. We go there in June, we're flying.

[Pause.]

I think I fancy a drink, it's so stifling in here.

[Ria gets herself an orange which she squeezes. At the same time Budd is stroking Winifred's thigh. Having strained the orange juice into a glass, Ria sits down to drink it. She has her dark glasses on and sits and puts her feet on the table. Madeline is sucking the pulp of the two halves of orange which Ria has left there.]

RIA (*to everyone*) : How do you like my shoes? (*She is wearing red shoes.*)

CHARLOTTE : They're very loud.

MADELINE : Me mammy got a pair like that, cheap, in Rathmines.

RIA : Christ, I wish it were evening. Candlelight is my favourite thing.

[*Pause.*]

Yes, we'll see snow on the Alps, if it's not melted.

CHARLOTTE : Who's going with you?

RIA : Oh ! Strangers. Strangers are such nice, friendly people.

[*Pause.*]

I'm going to be a deaf mute now for half an hour. Don't anyone talk to me.

WINIFRED : Peace. At last.

BUDD (*to Winifred*) : Put your shoes on and comb that (*ruffles her hair with his hand*) hair and we'll go out.

[*Ria leans over to listen. Winifred picks up her shoe, and puts a piece of cardboard in the sole of it. The Professor is humming:*]

PROFESSOR :

As I went down to the Fair of Athy
I saw an aul petticoat
Hangin' to dry,
I took off me aul drawers
And hung them thereby
To keep the aul petticoat . . . war . . . an).

RIA (*suddenly*) : I've given it up.

ACT ONE

WINIFRED : What?

RIA : Being a deaf mute. Ma, I saw this fabulous dress at a fashion show. Pebbly black, (*stands up to demonstrate it*) tight. The girl came in wearing it and the announcer said, "Looks lively in the country, takes neatly to town. Ideal for brunch or luncheon appointment." Then, the girl did some sort of conjuring trick and the neckline was down here. (*Ria indicates a neckline just covering the bust.*) And the announcer said, "Likes fun and meeting people. Ideal for that cocktail party," and then the mannequin did something *else*, she unzipped something and it was a dress with a flying panel and the announcer said, "From the soigné glitter of cocktail land to the

WINIFRED : Jesus Christ.

RIA : calm opulence of the dining-room. Likes your whole vivacious day . . ."

CHARLOTTE : They eat worms . . . mannequins, to keep thin.

RIA : But what girl would have that number of appointments in one day? (*enumerating with her fingers*) Brunch. Lunch. Cocktails, dinner. I mean, it's colossal.

MADELINE : Princess Margaret.

WINIFRED : The machinist in the sweat shop who made it.

RIA (*sighing*) : Can you get germs off a toilet?

WINIFRED : Do me a favour. Say lavatory.

RIA (*in a very casual voice as if it were the simplest word in the world*) : Lavatory.

WINIFRED : Are you middle-class now, Ria?

RIA : Whatever you are, I'm not.

[*Madeline comes over to Budd and says directly into his face as she sucks the pulp from the orange:*]

A CHEAP BUNCH OF NICE FLOWERS

MADELINE : Mary had a little . . .

BUDD : Lamb.

RIA (*to Madeline*) : You ought to be out in the fresh air playing with children your own age.

[*Pause. Ria goes over and picks up telephone book, observes Winifred getting ready.*]

We should have one of those new kind of parties they have in New York. Page Parties. You just open the telephone book—(*she opens it*) get a pin—(*She looks on the curtain for one, then on the hemline of Charlotte's dress where she finds one.*) CHARLOTTE (*pulling her dress down again*) : My character.

RIA : Then you just (*she picks a name with the pin and reads it*) do this : Who is it—Finbar Keogh. Don't like the sound of that. (*Picks another name.*) Barney J. McGuirk. We'll have him. You just pick a bunch, invite them over, and in no time, if you spice the martinis with pernod, the lawyers will be laughing with wives of tugboat men. That's what it said.

WINIFRED : When I die Ria will be written on my heart.

RIA : Ma, is it true that when people die their eyes stay open?

WINIFRED (*angrily*) : I don't know, I don't know, I said.

RIA (*whispers a song*) : Go to sleep little babe . . .

PROFESSOR (*looking at whiskey bottle with longing, says to Charlotte as he points to level of whiskey*) : That's what's known as the meniscus. There's the top (*pointing to it*) and there's the bottom of the meniscus.

ACT ONE

CHARLOTTE (*holding her tablespoon out for more*):
Is that significant?

BUDD (*pouring whiskey for each of them*): Come
on fill up.

(*sings*) And pass the bottle when he got dry,
Parnell was a proud man,
As proud as trod the ground,
And a proud man's a lovely man,
So pass the bottle round . . .

(*speech*) The drop of whiskey you get over there
for two and sixpence . . . I don't know how the
people of England stand for it! And you can be
compelled to work on a Sunday.

RIA: I love liqueurs. What do you call that blue
liqueur . . . Crème-de-menthe. Crème-de-menthe
frappé, it makes me so happé . . .

(*sings*) They try to tell us we're too young
Too young to really be in love,
They say that Love's a word,

CHARLOTTE: Love's cod, a pure cod.

[*Ria is still sticking pins in the directory, finds a
name.*]

RIA: Agnes Sibillant. No.

WINIFRED: An undertaker. (*to Budd*) We'll try and
leave this thing early. I want a night out.

PROFESSOR: Winifred, I heard a very ingenious
thing today. It's about a woman in Booterstown.

WINIFRED: I don't want to hear about a woman in
Booterstown.

PROFESSOR: She's deaf.

CHARLOTTE (*looking concerned*): That's what I'm
always tellin' her. (*Nods to Ria.*) You should never
fiddle with your ears, never stick match-sticks or

hair-pins in your ears. (*Wagging her fingers at Ria.*)
The drums.

RIA : If you confuse us once more with Dolores or that brat—(*nods to Madeline*) You'll regret it, I warn you.

PROFESSOR : Being deaf she cannot hear the telephone. So, she has a system. In the daytime when the telephone rings all the lights go on . . . automatically. And if it rings during the night, all the lights go out . . . automatically.

WINIFRED (*to Budd*) : They all ought to be in a home for retarded people.

RIA : I wrote a poem last night. Will I recite it?

PROFESSOR : I wish I could hit on an ingenious thing like that. I'd be wearing striped shirts every day.

RIA (*recites*) :

I was walking along a road feeling sad
When I smelt the smell of lilac,
I buried my head in it.

WINIFRED : You don't bury your head in it, fool.

RIA :

I buried my nose in it
And for a minute I forgot my sadness,
And I thought
If I could carry this smell
Around in my head,
I would no longer be sad.

CHARLOTTE (*disappointed*) : It doesn't rhyme.

PROFESSOR : Ah, the iambic pentameter, that's what you need to make a poem really go.

[*Winifred goes to the bookshelf and takes down a book.*]

ACT ONE

WINIFRED : I'll read you a poem, a proper poem by an ordinary man, sentenced to death. (*She puts on her glasses and reads from Vanzetti's last words.*) "If it had not been for these things I might have live out my life talking at street corners to scorn-ing men. I might have die, unmarked, unknown, a failure. Now we are not a failure. This is our career and our triumph . . ."

PROFESSOR (*going over to her*) : I think, Winifred, I shall have to lie down upstairs. I feel something coming. (*Taps his head.*) We are in on the birth of something great.

WINIFRED : Burnt blankets. Don't you set fire to the blankets this time. (*As Professor walks towards stairs door.*) And take your shoes off before you get into bed.

RIA : Give my love to the pilchards.

CHARLOTTE (*to Madeline*) : Come on up and we'll fit on dresses.

[*They exit. Madeline looks back to smile at Budd but he does not notice her.*]

BUDD (*to Winifred*) : Come on, we'll go up to Slat-tery's for a jar.

RIA : Oh, goodie. I'll wear my hat. (*Goes across to open parcel.*)

WINIFRED : What time is it? This thing in the Park is at five.

RIA (*rushing to telephone on sideboard*) : I'll ring the exchange.

WINIFRED : Put that down. Ringing the exchange every time you blow your nose.

[*Ria dials number and speaks into telephone in an affected voice.*]

RIA : This is the Hon. Miss Doone Wetherby here, what's the right time please . . . thank *you*. (*to Budd as she puts down the telephone*) Three fifty-nine. She said I had such a lovely voice, she said it was a pleasure to hear it, she just hears dull, old people all day.

[*Budd bows and smiles at her.*]

Budd, if you were dying, would you have a priest?
BUDD : Jesus Christ, of all the questions! Just back off me holidays. Haven't even changed me shirt and she asks me that.

RIA : But would you, seriously?

WINIFRED : Ria, shut up. You have no dignity. (*to Budd*) Two friends of mine stayed here for a week and, do you know, the day they left she wrote to them. "My new glorious talented friends," she began. "Thank you for being our guests and for partaking of the humble crumbs at our table and affording me such personal joy." Then came the key line, *she* asked *them* could they send her a Spanish shawl and a mantilla? They escaped out of Spain . . .

RIA : My mother only ate nettles as a child.

WINIFRED : Sharper than a serpent's tooth is a thankless child.

RIA (*to Budd*) : Wait till I show you what I got for the park. (*She opens a parcel, takes out an idiotic hat made of white artificial petals.*)

[*Budd and Winifred stare at it.*]

WINIFRED : Proper tart's hat, except that the tart would have something to go with it.

BUDD : Put it on, Ria.

ACT ONE

RIA : Wait till I get me mirror. (*she exits towards stairs*) and put it on properly. (*Her voice is heard offstage.*) I'd like a *real* antelope coat. Ma, you can have my camel-hair if you want it.

[*Budd takes Winifred in his arms and kisses her.*]

BUDD : I missed you. You wicked, briary, middle-aged woman. I told every girl I met in London about you.

WINIFRED : Did they give you a good time?

BUDD : Everything I wanted. (*The smile, and with his hangdog face he says:*) Ride the hack and save the hunter.

WINIFRED : The hunter is near her retirement.

BUDD : Nonsense. She's only just begun. (*tenderly*) How are you?

WINIFRED : I think . . . I think I'm going to die, Budd.

BUDD : Don't be daft.

WINIFRED : I do, really. That doctor was acting very funny today. Says I have to have X-rays.

BUDD : What are you talking about dying, Winifred? You're feeling marvellous. I should have bought you a present.

WINIFRED : Don't tell me you didn't bring your kids anything. (*She dabs powder on her face.*) We'll get two guns and two dolls when I draw my money.

[*Pause. He helps her into her coat.*]

If I die . . .

BUDD (*slapping her*) : Don't say that again.

WINIFRED : If it's true, how am I going to tell Ria? Every time I've had to tell something to my daughter . . .

BUDD (*turning her round so that she faces him*): You haven't got a daughter . . . you're too young. And stop being morbid. Did I ever tell you that one about the boy and girl going for a walk just after the war, and the girl sees oranges in a shop window, so she says she'd like some.

[*Winifred gets her handbag.*]

"Oh, they're reserved for pregnant women," said the shopkeeper. "That's all right," says your man, "we'll call in on the way back . . ." Come on . . .

[*He turns on the radio so that they won't be heard leaving. "Barbara Allen" is being sung by a woman. He turns up the collar of his coat as they exit, his arm around her.*]

[*Ria comes down the stairs saying:*]

RIA: Guess how much this hat cost? Guess?

[*Ria re-enters, wearing the hat. In one hand she is carrying a worn, silver-backed mirror, in the other she has a camel-hair coat.*]

Ma, I brought you the coat.

She sees that they have gone and stands speechless for a minute. Then, as the curtain falls, she is overcome by grief, anger and jealousy, and begins to cry.

Curtain

ACT TWO

The same room. Ten weeks later.

There is a single bed now in a corner.

Scene opens with Charlotte Russe cleaning the window with a chamois rag. She is on top of a step ladder humming " 'Twas on the Isle of Capri that I found her, 'neath the shade of an old apple tree, she wore a plain golden ring on her finger, 'twas good-bye to the Isle of Capri." It is a hot day and there are fly papers hanging from the ceiling. She rubs the window for a few minutes, has a rest, spits on the rag and re-rubs. There is a suitcase in the middle of the floor with its lid opened back. It is half-packed.

Enter Ria wearing a button-through linen dress, silk stockings and white sandals. She is eating an ice-cream.

CHARLOTTE : Oh . . . (through her nose) Hello Rita Hayworth.

[*Ria hoods her eyes with her hands and looks up at Charlotte on the ladder.*]

RIA : Working ! Jesus.

CHARLOTTE : You're home early, love.

RIA : I took a half-day off. I don't feel well . . . I don't know . . . it's so . . . hot. (*She is hot and agitated and pulls at the neckline of her dress as if she wanted to tear the dress off.*)

CHARLOTTE : The tar is burstin' on the road.

[*Pause.*]

Give us a lick. (*She sticks out her tongue to lick the ice-cream.*)

RIA : Can you get germs off a toilet? (*She kicks the half-packed suitcase.*) Is my kind and lovely mother buying bedjackets for her holiday?

CHARLOTTE : You know well she had an AP with Dr. Fogarty. I wanted to go with her. She looks a fright.

RIA : I think it's positively disgusting of her to go away with that Budd Connor.

CHARLOTTE : She has a rest coming to her. She works harder than any of us writing those articles. (*Coming down off ladder.*) It's only for a couple of days to Courttown harbour. The Professor and you and I will have rashers and eggs for our breakfast and kippers every evening for our tea.

RIA : Where is he?

CHARLOTTE : Gone downtown to see a man about a new invention of his. It's some new sort of . . . chair. (*Looks at a chair, picks it up, sits on it, puzzled how anyone could invent a new chair.*) I'd say he'll never leave here now. Dolores heard that he got thrown out of that place because he wouldn't keep his teeth in during meals. Terrible particular, Protestants are.

RIA : Nice thing it she makes a fool of herself (*kicks the case again*) by having a baby or something. (*Kneels down to examine the contents of the case. Takes out black brassière and talcum powder.*) Well, that's nine for a start.

CHARLOTTE : Sweet Jesus, I never thought of that. (*Pause.*) She's at the dangerous age. I've heard of hundreds of women havin' babies at her age. It's the change. They say you can have a baby at that

ACT TWO

age without doing a single thing about it. I know a woman who had. The shock she got! (*Clasps her hands in prayer.*) Thank God I was spared.

RIA : I'd just leave this house if she had, and never come back. (*She takes a few more things out of the suitcase and hides them behind the cushion on the sofa. She unscrews the top of a face-cream jar, smells it.*) Did my Queen Bee Jelly come?

[*Charlotte nods her head.*]

I filled up that coupon months ago . . . they're swindlers.

CHARLOTTE (*through her nose*): You can sue.

[*Ria finds a corkscrew in the case, holds it up.*]

RIA : She must be planning a booze. (*Pause.*) Eileen O'Donell was home on the bus with me, six months pregnant, and that Duggan one, you know that dopey one that takes size eleven in shoes, she's marrying a dentist. I don't know what gets into them . . . all this urgency to get married and have babies. She got on my bloody nerves talking about it, she asked me, imagine it, Char, she asked *me* to put *my* hand on her stomach and feel it kicking. "Excuse me," said I, "My migraine isn't too good today," and I stood up and had to get off the bus half a mile away from my own stop.

CHARLOTTE (*taking the ice-cream out of Ria's hand*): Ah, you'll be the next yourself. In no time at all I'll be throwing rice over you and Shoneen.

RIA (*furious*): I'm not going to marry him ever . . . ever, do you hear?

CHARLOTTE (*through her nose*): Oh, excuse me. I thought you two were engaged.

RIA : I know him since I was seven.

[Charlotte folds up the step ladder and puts it against the wall, then moves around the room, flapping the duster over the furniture. She takes a sweeping brush and drags it along the ceiling, giving the electric-light shade a rub.]

My hair is so greasy. I have this nightmare. I'm on my way to New York on an aeroplane and when I get there a whole lot of reporters are milling around trying to get a word with me and I have to say "Can I have my hair washed first?" My hair is so greasy. (*Feels it.*) I can't talk to the newspapers with all this grease dripping out of me.

CHARLOTTE : You could wear a headscarf.

RIA : Oh, Jesus Christ, where's the use in telling you anything. You have no understanding, Char, you have no imagination.

CHARLOTTE : What's wrong with you, darlin'? You're so jumpy today.

[The unexpected pity makes Ria gentle.]

RIA (*anxiously*) : I can't tell you. It's a secret. It's the biggest secret I've ever had. It's between me and one other person. (*Unbuttons another button of her dress and fans her face with her hand.*)

CHARLOTTE : I'll wash your hair if you tell me. We'll put vinegar in the rinsing water, (*through her nose*) to brighten it up.

RIA : I can't wash my hair either. It's that kind of secret . . . I'll have to see a specialist.

CHARLOTTE (*jumping with surprise*) : Good God, you're not having a baby, are you? Is that what's wrong with you? Is that why you couldn't touch

ACT TWO

Eileen's belly and not eatin' a bit o' breakfast for the last four mornings.

[Ria nods her head and starts to cry. Charlotte comes over and cuddles her in her arm while flapping away flies with the chamois duster which she is holding in the other hand.]

There is a light knock on the door.

Enter Shoneen Tracy. He is a small, delicate man of about twenty-four, wearing a dark suit and bicycle clips. He is dressed to look like a clerical student and is carrying Holy Pictures, statues and artificial flowers. He peeps in nervously.]

SHONEEN : Ria?

[Ria and Charlotte jump up in surprise.]

CHARLOTTE : Shoneen. Oh, God, the fright!

SHONEEN (*whispers*) : Is she out? I wondered, Ria, if your Mammy was here. I want to put a little Altar there. (*He crosses the room and begins to pick up the empty beer bottles and pile them into a turf bag which is nearby.*)

RIA : Don't touch *them*.

SHONEEN : But this is the best corner for a May Altar. Doesn't get the sun, the flowers won't fade.

RIA (*emphatic*) : Take your hands off them. My mother has kept those empties for years in case her tongue is ever hangin' out for a drink. You know that. I often told you. There's pounds' worth of empties there and they're staying there until my mother cashes them, or conks out.

SHONEEN : We can put them under the stairs.

A CHEAP BUNCH OF NICE FLOWERS

CHARLOTTE (*through her nose*): We could. I'd love a little Altar there. (*Handling them.*) Look at the lovely flowers.

RIA (*to Charlotte*): Turncoat.

[*Charlotte helps Shoneen pile the bottles into a sack and together they drag them across the stage. Ria is going around touching her chest as if she were suffering from indigestion.*]

CHARLOTTE: I'll go and make a cup of tea, in case the two of you have anything private to discuss.

[*Going behind Shoneen's back she raises her fist and threatens him with it, then winks at Ria, winds her right-hand fingers around her own wedding ring and makes a face at Ria as if to say "Capture him now."* She exits.]

SHONEEN: Look at your dress. (*He points to her buttons which are opened.*) It's immodest.

RIA: Do you wear a vest?

SHONEEN: I do. I used to wear a wool one, but me mammy found out that wool was not the best thing for bronchitis.

[*Pause.*]

Oh, that reminds me, I brought you something. (*He takes a medal out of his pocket and goes over and pins it to her bodice.*) I knew you'd like him. He's Blessed Martin de Porre, he's black. I have one for your Mammy too. She being for the under-privileged, she'd like him too.

RIA: I saw a funny thing, a woman wheeling two

ACT TWO

children, one black and one white. Which would you say she was married to?

SHONEEN (*beginning to lay the Altar*): I repaired eighteen rosaries today.

[*Ria starts filing her nails with temper. Shoneen puts his hands to his ears and cries:*]

Don't. Don't. I can't bear that noise.

RIA: What else can't you bear?

SHONEEN (*very confidentially*): That, and scraping your plate with your fork, and running your nails up and down your stockings.

RIA: That? (*She runs her nails up and down over her stockinged leg.*)

SHONEEN (*hands pressed to ears*): Don't. Don't.

RIA: God, my mother would have a laugh if she knew what our private life was like.

[*He goes to the Altar, she unbuttons more buttons so that her dress is now open down to the waist.*]

(*hums*) "But the dear knows who I'll marry."
(*speech*) Shoneen, would you like to marry me?

SHONEEN: I can't, Ria. Father Savage says I'm not cut out for marriage.

RIA: Are there parts of you missing or what?

SHONEEN: That's not a nice thing to say, Ria.

RIA: I'm having a baby, that's not a nice thing to say either.

SHONEEN (*turns round and blesses himself*): Oh, my God. Ria, how did that happen?

RIA: The usual way.

SHONEEN (*in a voice as forceful as he can muster up*): He'll have to marry you.

RIA: He can't, he's a married man.

A CHEAP BUNCH OF NICE FLOWERS

SHONEEN (*blesses himself again*): Oh, my God, a married man, what's come over you?

RIA : You used to say I was a rose. I'm a pregnant rose.

SHONEEN : When did it happen?

RIA : One Sunday.

SHONEEN (*recites*): "Is the sin greater by being committed on the Sabbath day?" Most certainly. A married man! You'll have to fast and pray and make reparation.

RIA : I'll have to take a dose of salts.

[*Shoneen falls on his knees in front of the Altar to pray and in the silence Charlotte Russe sticks her head in the door.*]

CHARLOTTE : Ah, the love-birds! The tea is made. (*Entering with tray.*) I'm not intrudin', am I? (*Giving tea to Ria.*) A married man, Ria, that's terrible news.

RIA : How is it terrible news when you're not supposed to know it? Snooping around outside, listening.

SHONEEN (*rising*): I'll have to go, Ria, I just remembered something important. It was a rosary I was to drop back to the convent, before devotions.

RIA : Sneak.

SHONEEN (*as he exits*): I'll come over and see you, maybe, this evening.

RIA : Everyone will think it's yours—Father Savage will.

SHONEEN (*as he goes out the door and bumps into Winifred, who is entering, says back to Ria*): That's calumny. (*to Winifred*) Oh, excuse me, Mrs. Hennessy, I have to rush.

WINIFRED : Well, rush.

ACT TWO

[*Winifred is wearing a white mackintosh and leaning on a walking stick. She looks much older and thinner than in the first act.*]

RIA (*lifts the hem of her dress and waves it after him*): Give my love to the pilchards. (*to Winifred*) You smell like a brewery.

WINIFRED: On two whiskeys.

CHARLOTTE (*flapping around and clasping her hands*): I'll add a drop of water to this for you, Mam. (*She holds the teapot in her hand.*) You'll need a drink of tea with what Ria has to tell you. Oh, Mrs. Hennessey, what's going to become of us at all, you sick with wan thing and she with another. 'Tis a bad time. I wouldn't wonder if I got a stroke. (*She stands there holding the teapot.*) A bad time for us all.

RIA: I better talk to you before you go away on your illicit week-end.

WINIFRED: It seems to be a day for news.

RIA: Charlotte, will you please leave the room, I want to have a word with my mother.

CHARLOTTE: I'm going to make myself some carageen moss. (*Exits.*)

RIA: I'm seven weeks pregnant, Ma.

WINIFRED: So that's your hobby: making babies. Didn't think he had it in him. All that mustard warmed him up.

RIA: What are you referring to?

WINIFRED: Those gay Sunday evenings when you light those stupid candles and Shoneen Tracy tells me that the soul of Josef Stalin is burning in hell.

RIA: It's not his. It's Budd Connor's baby.

WINIFRED (*astounded and suddenly jealous*): Budd Connor? He slept with you? Where?

RIA: Took me to a hotel the night you went down

the country to that meeting . . . He sleeps other places than on that coffin with you.

WINIFRED (*livid with anger*): Didn't think he saw anything in you, you going around raving about your hair being red underneath. I don't believe it.

[*Charlotte bursts in.*]

CHARLOTTE (*through her nose*): Oh, it's him all right. I know *him*. That's why I never like being alone with him. I never felt safe . . .

RIA : He says he likes younger women now.

CHARLOTTE : I said 'twas better to tell you. I said your mother ought to know.

RIA : Your mother, who has given you so much love and devotion, little girl. (*to the mirror*) You'll need iron pills now and maternity clothes and vitamins.

WINIFRED : Don't worry, I won't give you devotion much longer. I'll be dead in a couple of months.

RIA : What did you say?

[*Charlotte rushes over and grabs Winifred's wrist while Ria is buzzing around, looking for a pencil.*]

CHARLOTTE : Don't talk like that, it's not right. Don't tempt the Providence of the good God.

WINIFRED : I just paid three guineas to hear that I was going to die.

RIA : I don't believe it.

WINIFRED : Then, don't believe it.

CHARLOTTE : What are you saying, Mrs. Hennessey?

RIA : It's because of me and Budd. She's getting her own back on me now.

ACT TWO

WINIFRED : Go upstairs, Charlotte, and see if the Professor has any whiskey. I need it.

CHARLOTTE : Oh, mother of God, the trouble that's on us and no wonder, we didn't do our Easter Duty.

WINIFRED : Stop raving and get me a drink. (*She sits on the bed.*)

RIA : I suppose you'll go on a binge now. You'll set out for your week-end blind drunk.

WINIFRED : I'm drunk . . . I've got three months to live, why shouldn't I be drunk?

RIA (*taken aback*) : Stop bluffing.

WINIFRED : Bluffing. I've got cancer, do you know what it is? A disease that eats you away. The modern disease. In three months I'll be like a thread, and then you can bury me, or burn me, or throw me in the sea—do whatever is economic.

[*Ria is uncertain whether her mother is bluffing or not.*]

RIA : Oh, Ma!

WINIFRED : Oh, Ma.

RIA : I don't believe it. I know why you're saying this, it's because I'm carrying Budd Connor's baby.

WINIFRED : Three guineas I had to pay to find out.

RIA : Don't mention the profit motive to me again or I'll scream. And stop glaring.

WINIFRED : Supposing I cover my face. (*Does so, and looks through the grille of her spread out fingers.*) Now, how's that?

RIA : I'm going to have a baby, Ma. I'm seven weeks gone.

[*Pause.*]

A CHEAP BUNCH OF NICE FLOWERS

I used to meet him after work for a few drinks. Then that night you were gone away, he said, "Don't go home, stay with me," and he persuaded me to go to this hotel on the quays . . . We went back again. He said it would be nicer the second time or the third.

WINIFRED : You ought to have known what you were doing.

RIA : He said 'twas all right, he'd got all this equipment you see, when he was in London. He said 'twas dead safe with all this equipment.

[*Pause.*]

WINIFRED : You had to wait until now to spring your little surprise on me, your little cheap bunch of nice flowers. Cruelty is no new thing to me : they wakened my father up in the middle of the night to tell him they were going to hang him at dawn.

RIA : Any minute now you'll be in tears.

WINIFRED : That's right, Ria, you're observant. That's what I like about my daughter, she's a wise, observant human being.

RIA : I *had* to tell you, Ma, before you went away. In case anything happened to you.

[*Pause. They sit side by side in silence.*]

RIA : Are you lying, Ma? About the doctor?

[*Pause. Ria touches her mother's hand.*]

I'll let you be godmother.

WINIFRED : Can't oblige. Sorry. I'll be dead.

ACT TWO

[*Ria goes on stroking her mother's hand.*]

(*in a sharper voice*) I want no plastic flowers, remember that, or concrete tombstones with fiddle-faddle and "To my darling mother . . ."

RIA (*pulling her hand away*): I know you. Looking for sympathy. Money and sympathy. You'll be dying publicly for the next thirty or forty years. You always get what you want.

WINIFRED: I wanted one thing and I didn't get it.

RIA: We know. An intelligent son.

WINIFRED: Life Everlasting.

RIA: Is it true, Ma? Are you telling the truth? (*Touches her mother's lips with her forefinger.*) You can get Life Everlasting. You're always telling me about the power of the mind, Ma, and how you can will away warts if you wish.

WINIFRED: Yes, Ria. I'll will away warts between then and now.

RIA: It's not true. It's not true. I know you're lying.

WINIFRED: Why should I lie, Ria? Why?

[*Enter Charlotte.*]

CHARLOTTE (*through her nose*): Everyone is gone mad, pure mad. Must be thou'll bombs. (*normal voice*) The Professor with a bottle under his bed and I thought 'twas a drop of whiskey and took a sup for the shock and what do you think—he uses the bottle for another purpose altogether. And the lavatory only a stone's throw away. A grown man with a dressin' gown an' all.

WINIFRED: Oh, let it. (*Kicks suitcase.*) Here, help me carry this thing upstairs.

RIA: You're lying. She's lying.

CHARLOTTE: Oh, the shock. I'm as weak as water.

A CHEAP BUNCH OF NICE FLOWERS

I always said we should have a horseshoe over that door for good luck.

WINIFRED (*taking one end of the case*): Come on . . .

CHARLOTTE (*restraining her*): But you're going away. Mr. Connor will be here any minute. He's in for a shock too.

[*The cuckoo cuckoos.*]

It was nothing to tell you. It's no thing for anyone to hear. My legs are giving . . .

WINIFRED (*dragging case towards stairs door*): There's no going away now, I have things to do. (*Pointing out directions.*) I'll want to sleep down here from now on . . . we'll get that screen out and put it here. (*She moves down centre.*)

CHARLOTTE (*frightened voice*): All right, Mrs. Hennessey.

WINIFRED (*pointing to the shelves of books*): I want the books from the top moved down, they're my good books. I want them near me where I can reach out for them.

[*Ria mounts the step ladder rapidly and throws down a bundle of books. As she takes one in her hand, says:*]

RIA: Oh, all the sexy books. (*Reads title.*) "The Idiot" by Dostoevski. Crikey, that must be me.

WINIFRED (*to Ria*): Come down off of there.

RIA: Of course. It's fatal to climb in my condition . . .

WINIFRED (*to Charlotte*): And that table in your room with the two drawers, I'd like it beside my bed here. He said I'll have to go to bed soon, the

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pain will drive me there. (*Takes a box of pills from pocket.*) These are for pain. (*to Charlotte*) So, don't think they're green pills for anything funny. (*Looks around the room.*) What else?

RIA : God, we might get this place brightened up. We might even change the wallpaper and the pictures . . .

WINIFRED : We'll change nothing. Nothing. Everything is to be the way I want it, that calendar, everything.

RIA (*rushing to it*) : Oh, I must look up dates.

CHARLOTTE : I don't know whether I'm coming or going. (*to Ria*) Look at the way she's taking it.

WINIFRED : Leave her alone.

CHARLOTTE (*to Winifred*) : And you got fat, you put on a pound, you said so yourself. How could you get fat and be going to die? I never know when you're joking.

WINIFRED : I made my last joke yesterday.

CHARLOTTE (*clasping her hands*) : Oh, Saint Anthony, what are we going to do? How are we going to live with this hanging over us?

RIA : Nine months less seven weeks. Michaela is my favourite name. If it's twins we'll need two names.

WINIFRED : You think you'd have taken more care.

RIA : He said 'twas all right with all this equipment. Dead safe, in fact. (*She raises her arms above her head and joins them in an arc as she walks about.*) He said it would be nicer the second time and it was.

WINIFRED (*taking coverlet off bed*) : We'll use any old sheets . . . they'll be infectious.

CHARLOTTE (*breaking into tears*) : Oh, God, how can you say things like that.

WINIFRED : Don't start, *don't please* start a scene now that will go on for the next three months.

(*softer*) We have things to do, Charlotte, I need you to help, I have so much to do that me head is bursting with plans. So little time . . .

RIA : I'll be a good mother, that's one thing.

WINIFRED : You will, Ria. The Universal Mother.

RIA : I'll need a special kind of calcium diet, we'll have to make out a chart. That's why I bite my nails, lack of calcium. And I'll need matinée coats.

WINIFRED : I'll need a shroud.

RIA : This dress is too tight for me already . . . I'll have to get maternity clothes straight away. I know, there's a smashing nightdress upstairs. I read about a mannequin who dined at the Ritz in her nightdress and it won her more compliments than any other thing she'd ever worn.

CHARLOTTE : You should have more respect for your mother. She . . .

RIA : She was a dispatch runner at nine years of age. She chewed a telegram rather than hand it over to the Bloody English. She was in love with Ireland when every other girl of nine was in love with coconut creams. But at the moment she's lying.

WINIFRED : Come on Char, we'll bring this up . . .

CHARLOTTE : Don't lift it. (*Rushing over.*) Don't strain yourself. Take a pill. Take one of those green pills he gave you . . .

[*They exit. Ria walks around in her slip.*]

RIA : I'll need iron. Vitamins. A crib. No, a cradle. A pram. Safety pins that don't scratch and . . . he'll have to marry me . . . (*She sits down on sofa.*)

[*Charlotte re-enters from upstairs carrying a little table.*]

ACT TWO

CHARLOTTE : Is it crying you are?

RIA : He probably doesn't love me.

[*Pause.*]

He didn't tell me. He didn't say "I love you" or "You're beautiful." No nice lies. All he kept telling me was to relax, relax. He said he was a great lover, I ought to be honoured, he was a spoilt priest and spent seven years with the Jesuits.

CHARLOTTE : Don't anyone tell me anything else today or my head will burst. Your mother going to die and it hasn't taken a feather out of you.

RIA : Do you think I'm daft enough to believe a story like that? Now, Charlotte, use your head.

[*Ria taps Charlotte's forehead.*]

Use your reason, if a woman was going to die, would a doctor tell her so, would any doctor under the sun say "You're going to die, Mrs. Hennessey, I thought I'd better tell you"?

[*Charlotte nods her head very seriously.*]

CHARLOTTE : I never thought of that. (*Thinks for a minute.*) I suppose he wouldn't.

RIA : Of course he wouldn't. It's a lie. He probably said she was getting the change of life and ought to take things easier, stop gadding around like a girl. Isn't it funny how the minute I said I was going to have a baby she came out with her story.

CHARLOTTE : But surely she wouldn't tell a lie about a thing like that?

RIA : You said yourself that the change takes some women funny. We'll just have to humour her and

act as normally as possible. In a week she'll be herself again.

CHARLOTTE : I don't know where I am. She was up there, askin' me about commodes and undertakers . . .

[Ria sits with her head in her hands while Charlotte starts moving the books down, etc. She appears to be sobbing.]

Oh, well, you made your bed, you can lie on it now.
RIA : I wonder if he loves me.

[Pause.]

When he went to sleep I got up and stood at the window. In the morning he said to me, "I suppose you don't want breakfast, do you Ria?" I said no and left five shillings under the pillow for the chamber maid.

CHARLOTTE : Your mother can't be making it up. She wouldn't make up a thing like that.

RIA : It's in her imagination. You know what a fantasy she has, she's always making things up, always.

CHARLOTTE (*a moment's thought*) : No, she isn't.

RIA : She is. She's constantly letting her imagination run away with her. You wait a week and you'll have to move all those things back again.

CHARLOTTE : Again! I don't know, one pregnant and the other dying . . .

RIA : I wasn't going to tell anybody, it's been eight weeks. I went through agony. Morning sickness and agony.

CHARLOTTE : You should suck a tomato for that.

ACT TWO

RIA : Char . . . He has this funny thing on his back, d'you know what it is?

CHARLOTTE : How would I know?

RIA : The crucifixion in colour—on his back.

CHARLOTTE : My head is burstin'.

RIA : As sure as God. Cross my heart. (*Does so.*) Christ occupies the centre of his back and the thieves are under his armpits. All in red. Tattoo.

[*Pause.*]

We went to a hotel on the quays. He signed me on as Mrs. Budd Connor. He had brandy sent up.

CHARLOTTE (*bursting with curiosity, says through her nose*) : And then?

RIA : Don't be so nosey.

CHARLOTTE (*through her nose*) : You can't begin to tell a person a thing and suddenly stop up . . . it's not fair. What happened next?

RIA : You know. You had Dolores.

CHARLOTTE (*through her nose and uppity*) : I was asleep at the time. We never went to hotels or did anything like that.

RIA (*confidential*) : Oh, Char, he said the weirdest things . . . about offering up the Body and Blood of Womankind. Char, 'twas like the mass, Latin and everything.

CHARLOTTE : And then?

RIA : Well, you don't want a minute-by-minute account.

[*Pause.*]

You know what he said to me when we got up in morning? "I suppose you don't want breakfast, do

you, Ria?" I said "No," and left five shillings under the pillow for the chamber maid.

CHARLOTTE (*through her nose*): That's what I need, a job with tips. Any news of his Missus, any information why she killed herself?

RIA: No.

WINIFRED (*upstairs*): Charlotte, come up and help me carry this screen.

CHARLOTTE (*in cooing voice*): Com . . . ing.

[*Outside we hear Budd Connor chanting:*]

BUDD (*outside*):

Gloria in eggshellsus deo

Et in Terra packs home in a bus

[*Charlotte rushes across room and looks out to see if it is really him, rushes back saying:*]

CHARLOTTE: It's him. He's just comin' in the gate outside. Mother o' God, you'd never think he had the Crucifixion on, under that sports coat. Here he is. Sssh. Sssh.

[*Enter Budd Connor in light sports coat. He is drunk but not staggering. In the doorway he stands and finishes chanting.*]

BUDD: Bone, voluntatis, Laudamus Tay. Tay. Instant coffee. (*speech*) God save all here. Top o' the mornin' etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. (*to Charlotte*) Would you like my blessin', Mam? (*Makes sign of Cross in the air.*) Well, would you, I have great powers you know. I was nearly . . . a Reverend Father. They found a flaw in me, a real flaw (*taps his back*) here. I got it from a brown cow's milk,

ACT TWO

thirty-seven years ago, bovine T.B. Isn't that a lovely disease to have, a lovely phrase, "Bovine Tuberculosis". That cow was my best friend. I used to drive her in and out. We lived in a street. No back entrance. That cow went through the kitchen morning and night and do you know she never . . . Never once.

[*Charlotte turns away from him.*]

(*to Ria*) Hello Ria, I heard you rang me this morning.

[*Charlotte exits as quickly as possible, and as she escapes he says, taking a toothbrush from his breast pocket:*]

That's all I need for me holidays. Never travel without it. Night and morning, morning and night. (*Brushes his teeth with the dry brush.*)

RIA (*shaking her head*): She's not going away with you.

BUDD: That's what *you* think.

RIA: No, really. She's in a fit. Wait till you see. (*taking off her dress fully now, coyly.*) I have something to tell you.

BUDD: You love me?

RIA: No, but you'll need to love me. I'm having a baby.

BUDD: Whose? Child?

RIA: Whose! Yours, dear.

BUDD: Im . . . poss . . . ible. I mean a wee encounter like that couldn't have repercussions.

RIA: Well, it has.

BUDD: I know, it's the Holy Ghost.

[Pause.]

One night. Who would have thought it? Crime and punishment. (*Looks to ceiling.*) There's a God all right, up there attending to the punishment. (*He frowns, then starts to sing:*)

I feel like a cherry said Mary to Joseph,
Let him pluck thee a cherry who got
thee with child.

RIA : What are we going to do?

BUDD : We?

RIA : Yes. We.

BUDD : You're pale, you're hot. (*Has his hand on her forehead.*) You need a drink. Where's your mother and we'll go up to Slattery's for a jar.

RIA : I need a father (*pats her stomach*) for this thing. Such sickness as I've endured.

BUDD : Have you told her?

RIA : Just now.

BUDD : Christ. You'll have to take something.

RIA : I'm a Catholic.

BUDD : Jesus, that's lovely. I'm a Catholic and I found myself in bed with a man, one starry night. (*sings*) "To save her from the foggy foggy dew". (*speech*) That's funny, Ria, funny, funny.

[Pause.]

You can go to England.

RIA : I just can't go over there to have a baby.

BUDD : Oh, but you can! That's where you're mistaken. Hundreds go every week . . . just to have a baby. (*Cradles an imaginary child in his arms.*) They have such guilt about us, the English, that when they hear you're coming, they'll put you on television. (*proclaims*) "This is Your Mess". Simple.

ACT TWO

RIA : Simple for you standing there in your sports coat, making light of the whole thing.

BUDD (*puts his arm around her and pinches her waist*) : Where's your mother? Come on. We'll go up to Slattery's—they got an air-conditioner in.

[*Winifred and Charlotte enter slowly, carrying the screen. They open it up on the centre of the floor.*]

What's this? Decorators?

WINIFRED (*in a very slow, bitter voice*) : So you ride the hack and save the hunter, do you?

BUDD (*rushing across to be forgiven by her*) : Oh, Winifred, once, one little moment, where's your pity gone?

WINIFRED : She said it was nicer the second time.

BUDD (*emphatic and angry*) : Once, Winifred.

[*Pause.*]

She followed me around like my spotted dog and sent me things. (*He searches in his pocket.*) *Things.* (*He takes out a penknife that has a corkscrew attached.*) This, and bunches of lupins. Lupins, for Christ's sake, why lupins?

WINIFRED : Has she told you my good news?

BUDD : No, she hasn't. Come on. (*Takes her coat from back of door and holds it for her.*) Take that bitter Reverend Mother's look off your face, Winifred.

WINIFRED : I have to stay at home, Budd, and settle my effects, as they say. I'll leave you the view of the mountains from my bedroom window, and there's a piece of horse chain that belonged to her father.

A CHEAP BUNCH OF NICE FLOWERS

BUDD : Oh, Winifred, pipe down. There's no need for this.

[*Ria has gone to telephone and dialled number.*]

RIA : Is that the meteorological office? I want to make an enquiry about snow on the Alps.

WINIFRED : I'm going to die. Doctor Thing-a-Majigg told me half an hour ago.

BUDD : He couldn't. Doctors never tell people when they're going to die. He wouldn't tell you a thing like that.

WINIFRED : He asked me could some member of my family pop around to see him. "Am I going to die?" I said. 'Twas written all over his face.

RIA (*into telephone*) : Well, you see, it's about skiing, and I want to know if the snow melts in the summer.

BUDD : But . . . ? (*Throws his hands up in a gesture of fury and frustration.*)

WINIFRED : I knew it all along. I didn't hear it today, I heard it months ago. I tell you . . . He said this pain will get worse. These are for the . . . joyous moments . . . (*Shows him the pills.*)

BUDD (*angrily, as he takes pills from Winifred's hand and scatters them all over floor*) : Stop it, stop it, you're driving me mad.

WINIFRED : Stop what?

BUDD : This going to die plan.

WINIFRED (*very slowly, sadly, and seriously*) : Budd, I have cancer, and I am going to die.

[*Ria, who is standing behind her mother's back, shakes her head at Charlotte as if to say, "it's a lie". She then says into telephone:*]

ACT TWO

RIA : That's perfectly all right, thank you very much. (*Puts telephone down.*) Would you believe it, there's still snow.

BUDD : Who is that bloody doctor anyhow? I'm going over there to kill him.

CHARLOTTE (*who is on her knees picking up the pills*) : Doctor Fogarty.

BUDD : Fogarty ! I know him. He's a fool. He plays badminton at night.

WINIFRED : With an addition to your family you'd want to be around to provide . . .

RIA : I'll probably have Doctor Fogarty too for the first few months and I'll probably have the Master of the Rotunda or someone like that.

[*Winifred looks around and sees the Altar for the first time; points to it.*]

WINIFRED : What is that monstrosity?

CHARLOTTE (*through her nose*) : We was spring cleaning. I did the walls and the windows . . .

WINIFRED : Where are my empty bottles?

CHARLOTTE (*flustered, she points to Ria who is sitting on the step ladder*) : She was here, she's a witness. Mr. Tracy did it.

WINIFRED : Get those bottles wherever they are.

CHARLOTTE (*through her nose*) : Under the stairs.

[*Winifred goes to Altar and begins to throw the flowers on the floor and to pitch the statues and pictures on the floor too.*]

WINIFRED : I want everything I own where I can see it.

BUDD (*in an imploring voice*) : He's a fool . . . ?

A CHEAP BUNCH OF NICE FLOWERS

WINIFRED: He's a fool all right but not as far as my insides are concerned. Anyhow there was a specialist as well. I got the full treatment.

BUDD: It's not true. You wouldn't be taking it like this.

WINIFRED (*hard*): How am I supposed to take it? (*Pause, then softer*) It's not a shock to me, Budd, I knew it for days and nights. (*to Ria and Charlotte*) Have those bottles back in twenty minutes.

[*Ria and Charlotte exit.*]

(*standing before a still of the Steps of Odessa scene from the film "Battle of Potemkin"*) Well, I won't see Russia now . . . hardly. I'll get the brochures anyhow. (*Goes for writing pad and makes note on it.*)

BUDD: That's more like it. Get some brochures. We'll both go. Caviar. Vodka. Vodka on the rocks, Winifred. (*Putting his arm around her.*)

WINIFRED (*very seriously*): You'll have to marry her, Budd.

BUDD: I'd only marry her if I couldn't have you.

WINIFRED: Well, you can't.

[*Pause.*]

I think there's something treacherous about a woman who gets pregnant the first time she sleeps with a man, nevertheless I'm asking you to marry her . . . marry her and make something out of her. There's no need for her to go on being a fool all her life.

[*Ria re-enters with armload of bottles.*]

ACT TWO

BUDD (*disenchanted*) : I'm going to marry you, Ria.
RIA (*delighted*) : Do you mean it?

[*She rushes out again, having dumped the bottles on the bed.*]

RIA (*calling*) : Char, Char, where are you, I want to tell you.

[*Ria and Charlotte re-enter, dragging the sack of bottles, and the Professor enters from street door.*]

PROFESSOR : You can hear it out on the street. Is it good news?

RIA : We're getting married.

PROFESSOR : Congratulations. Let me know what present you'd like. Let me know well ahead of time. I had a bit of luck today, meeting that man . . .

RIA : A three-piece suite. (*Thinks.*) No, a fawn pram with a tasselled hood. Let's . . . oh, Ma, let's think of something exciting to finish up this day, let's open the wine or have one of those page parties I was telling you about, where lawyers laugh with the wives of tugboat men. (*embracing her mother*) I want roses and nightdresses . . .

[*The Professor takes bottle of whiskey from his pocket, and very quickly Charlotte produces glasses to be filled.*]

CHARLOTTE (*nudging Winifred with her elbow*) : I knew 'twould have a happy ending. (*She goes for more glasses.*)

BUDD (*to Charlotte, on far side of screen*) : What do

you think you're saying? How can you talk like that to a woman that's going to die?

CHARLOTTE : Ria says it's a false alarm.

BUDD : Ria says !

WINIFRED : I want my bed here . . .

RIA : And we'll *all* go on a honeymoon. I know the places to go : Nice for fish and soups, Copenhagen for heavy sauces, Villefranche for shellfish, Lyons for snails and frogs' legs . . .

CHARLOTTE : London for sex.

WINIFRED : The bed will be here, near the window . . . the screen here . . . now, I'd like a shelf along here for my pots of geraniums. Can you make a shelf? We have a hammer out there.

PROFESSOR : Geraniums . . . ? I'll do that, Winifred. I'll do that for you.

RIA : Ma, you can bathe in the thermal waters of Baden-Baden where generals bathe . . .

BUDD : Stop it, stop it, stop it !

WINIFRED : Leave her alone. We'll knock this window out and put a door there, we'll have flowers and creeper coming in the door. We'll live like happy people. Leave her alone.

PROFESSOR (*drinks*) : Aah. A noble whiskey. I know a good whiskey. I only take the best. Only the best is good enough. Black label. And striped shirts. And English biscuits. (*He dips a biscuit in his drink.*) The Irish never mastered the art of biscuit making.

RIA (*to Charlotte*) : We'll have caterers in here and striped awning over the door. I wonder what day of the week I'll get married. I like September . . . it's nearer the winter.

CHARLOTTE (*still dithering around doing things which Winifred motions her to do, kicks the sewing machine*) : We'll have to get that mended if I'm to

ACT TWO

make your dress. I made Dolores's, do you remember. (*through her nose*) She was the cynosure of all eyes.

BUDD (*drinking whiskey very fast, says to Winifred*): Tell me you dreamed it, say you never went to see him.

WINIFRED (*mechanically*): I never went to see him.

BUDD (*raising his eyes to heaven*): Oh, you wicked schoolmaster of a God that watcheth over the lilies in the field and never yet done me a good turn, do it now. (*raising his fist*) DO IT.

PROFESSOR: Yes, I had a bit of luck with this man. That's why I bought that whiskey, as a matter of fact. He says he's very keen for new ideas, young blood and new ideas.

[*Pause.*]

There's a fortune to be made somewhere; old masterpieces in barns all over the country, and ivory tusks brought back from India. I'll scour the country on a bicycle . . .

WINIFRED (*to Charlotte*): I'd like to bring my desk in here and my typewriter and a toothmug for pencils.

[*Madeline passes by back window and Ria rushes over.*]

RIA: Call her, call her. I'll want her to be my train bearer.

CHARLOTTE: Wait a minute now. Dolores's eldest would be scrumptuous . . .

RIA (*has lifted the window by now, calls*): Madeline.

[*Madeline enters under raised sash.*]

I'm getting married, Madeline, and I want you to be my train bearer.

MADELINE (*almost speechless*): A frock to the floor. (*Then she remembers that she hasn't saluted anyone, so she says:*) Hello Mrs. Hennessey. Hello the Professor. (*She bows towards Budd.*) Hello (*to Charlotte*) and hello.

RIA: And you'll have a bouquet, probably lily of the valley, depends on what month. You'll have a smaller bouquet than me and I'll have a tiara.

CHARLOTTE (*through her nose*): We should put an incision in the paper. "The engagement is announced between Ria, eldest daughter of . . .

RIA: *Youngest* daughter of . . . get a pen and paper. Quick. For the Hatch, Match and Dispatch column. Budd, was your father anyone of note . . .

WINIFRED (*holding a little silver handbell and ringing it gently*): I want you to bring your kids up tomorrow, I have a few little do-da's like this and (*picks up a paper weight that has snow inside it*) this . . .

BUDD: Come to New Zealand with me.

WINIFRED: I'd rather go to Russia. They can bring me home on a stretcher.

CHARLOTTE (*very excited, as if she had solved everything*): Lourdes. Miracles by the minute. People getting their legs back and everything.

PROFESSOR: Winifred, I think I hit on something interesting today. I've found a way of hastening the process of fermentation. (*Pause.*) Extra yeast . . .

WINIFRED: I always meant to learn Russian, to read Gorki, that was one thing I meant to do. I could get books, maybe . . .

RIA: Will someone tell me what to say?

ACT TWO

[Charlotte carries in two pots of red geraniums.]

CHARLOTTE (*to Winifred*): Is it these you wanted?

WINIFRED: Yes. (*Lifts cushion from sofa and sees her belongings which Ria snatched from suitcase and hid there.*) I want everything to be just as it was. I want no one to know, only ourselves. The Professor is going to make a stand for them, Charlotte, put them there . . . for the time being. Not to cringe, not to yield, but standing like a thistle before the scythe . . .

PROFESSOR: What's all this, Winifred? Are you saying a poem or what?

RIA: *Will* someone help me with this? God.

[Charlotte is moving the chairs to put the geraniums down, Madeline has bumped against the screen.]

Such commotion. Will I say the engagement is announced and the wedding will take place or shortly take place?

WINIFRED: Say the wedding will take place under considerable blackmail; ask for public donations.

RIA: I'll need to give a month's notice and have marriage banns read, and get maternity clothes and . . . (*sings*)

This is my lovely day

You can't take this away

This is the day I will remember

The day . . . I'm dying . . .

(*speech*) And I'll walk up the aisle with you, Ma, and you (*to Professor*), you'll give me away in a striped shirt and (*hums*) Bum, Bum, Ba-Bum and the harmonica will be playing and a trail of white chiffon will follow behind . . .

A CHEAP BUNCH OF NICE FLOWERS

BUDD : Ria, have you gone mad?

RIA : And you'll be there ages before me, the groom is always first, and you won't have seen me in my long dress, it's unlucky, and everybody will be weeping : Shoneen, and Charlotte Russe, and the Professor, and Madeline and her mother, and Dolores, and Eileen O'Donnell, and Doctor Fogarty and all our relations . . . Ma, don't die.

Winifred is still directing Charlotte, the Professor has now stood up and is tugging at Winifred's sleeve. Budd is standing, fists clenched.

Curtain

ACT THREE

It is three months later; a warm day in August.

The room is as it was at the end of Act Two; the screen still dividing it in half. The bed is nearer the window, as Winifred wanted it, and the Professor has built a shelf for the geraniums. This side of the screen is the "sick room". Once again a melody is heard played upon a fiddle; a bad rendering of "Danny Boy".

Winifred is in bed being tended to by Charlotte. Ria is in the other half of the room (near street door) wearing a maternity dress and doing physical exercises. On the floor beside her is a book: "How to Have a Baby Happily". At the bedside Charlotte is patting Winifred's forehead with a damp cloth.

CHARLOTTE (*singing*): "Oh Danny Boy, the pipes, the pipes are calling, from glen to glen, way down the mountain side" . . . (*speech*) Now who's nice? Givvus a nice smile, go on.

WINIFRED: Tell that fiddler to go away. (*Her voice is weaker than before. She reaches to bedside table for her purse.*)

CHARLOTTE (*shouts out to Ria*): Tell that fiddler to go away.

RIA: Can't. I'm busy.

WINIFRED (*takes medal from her purse and feels it with her hand*): Give him this. Shoneen's black saint. Tell him we're using this now instead of money. Counterfeit.

CHARLOTTE (*as she takes the medal*): Anything special you'd like him to play—"The Rose of Tralee"?

WINIFRED: I pay him to go away. (*The voice is weak, but the tone gruff.*)

A CHEAP BUNCH OF NICE FLOWERS

CHARLOTTE (*as she goes towards screen to reach street door*): "It's a long way to Tipperary"?

WINIFRED: And a short one to the grave.

[*Music stops. Fiddler knocks on the door. As Charlotte comes through, she sees Ria on the floor doing her exercises, and as she passes by gives her a gentle kick.*]

CHARLOTTE: Get up and make yourself useful. (*She opens the door to fiddler and hands him the medal without indicating that it is a medal.*)

FIDDLER (*offstage*): Oh, a grand day, grand day, we'll pay for this weather yet. How's Mrs. Hennessey today?

CHARLOTTE (*through her nose*): Only middling. (*in a lower voice*) She wasn't too good this morning, she nearly sniffed away.

FIDDLER: Tell her to take it easy. See you next Monday.

CHARLOTTE: I'll tell her. (*closing door*) See you next Monday.

RIA (*putting her hand to her nose*): There's a smell in this room.

[*Charlotte rushes back past screen to say something urgent to Winifred, who has her eyes closed.*]

CHARLOTTE: Are you awake? Well, the fiddler sent you in his love and says to tell you his mother had the exact same complaint as you have (*touches Winifred's stomach through bedspread*) in here, and all the doctors and everyone gave her up, and she bested the lot of them and she's going around now fit as a two-year-old.

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WINIFRED : Second childishness. (*Pause.*) Where's Ria?

CHARLOTTE (*lying*) : She's peeling apples for stewing. Dolores sent up apples for you. You never saw such a crop as she had.

WINIFRED : I want to talk to Ria. There's two things I want to tell her; not to wear white to my funeral and not to ask people to send wreaths. I know *her*, she'd ring people now and ask them to start saving to buy wreaths. Two things I want to tell her! Two hundred things I want to tell her. Poor Ria.

CHARLOTTE : You lie back and rest yourself.

[*Ria is still doing her exercises and counting, 1, 2, 3, 4 while she moves legs and arms. She is lying flat on the floor with her back to street door.*]

Madeline enters, reciting dramatically:]

MADELINE :

In a dark, dark county there's a dark, dark street,
In a dark, dark street there's a dark, dark house,
In a dark, dark house there's a dark, dark upstairs,
In a dark, dark upstairs there's a dark, dark room,
In a dark, dark room there's a GHOST.

RIA (*sitting up*) : My God, women have had a miscarriage for less.

CHARLOTTE (*rushing out on tip-toe*) : Can ye go a bit easy? She's trying to go off to sleep. Must be those injections the doctor gave her. One minute she was saying something to me and the next minute . . .

MADELINE : Me mammy sent me in to see how she was.

CHARLOTTE : All right, love . . . you go in and sit

A CHEAP BUNCH OF NICE FLOWERS

with her, while I get me jobs done. Just sit there in case she calls.

[*Madeline crosses to "sick room" area.*

Ria starts to peel an apple and tries to peel it all in one piece so that the skin is intact.]

RIA : There's definitely a smell in this room. (*Pause.*) Got it. (*The skin did not break.*) I'll get my wish.

CHARLOTTE : She wants calf's foot jelly, have we any money?

RIA : I have two threepenny bits. Maybe loverman will have some, when he comes. (*Looks at her watch.*) He should be here.

CHARLOTTE : If he comes.

RIA : What you mean, if he comes? He comes every day. (*Taps her stomach.*) I think it's moving. What month does it move at? (*She reaches for book and flicks through pages.*) Oh Char, d'you know what it says here, it says when you have a baby that you ought to count all the buttons in the house and then if there's a button missing you'll know if the baby swallowed it.

CHARLOTTE : He comes to see your mother. When *she* goes he goes, mark my words.

RIA : That's what you think.

CHARLOTTE : What'll we do for money? The Professor hasn't a tosser.

RIA : Sell the bottles.

CHARLOTTE : Can't get them out of the room, she'd hear them rattling. You should never have given up that job. God, when your mother was writing those articles we were well away. Chicken on Sundays.

RIA : Gravy on Mondays! (*recites*) Teach me Lord how to embellish Saturday's tripe with Monday's

ACT THREE

relish. (*Putting on a straw basket over her head.*) Embellish! Anyhow I had to give up that job, when I told my boss that I was having a baby, he said that clients coming in would have no desire to talk to a pregnant woman.

CHARLOTTE : Bed sores are terrible.

[*Charlotte has a long crepe bandage in her hand which she is unrolling. When she has fully unrolled it she stands behind Ria's back and puts the bandage around Ria's stomach, then draws the two ends back tight so that Ria's stomach is harnessed.*]

A pregnant woman. (*She looks around at Ria's front.*)

[*Ria is as slim as she was in Act One; the maternity dress is only a disguise to hide the fact that she has not grown bigger.*]

A little girl that's let her imagination run away with her, that's what!

RIA (*breaking loose from the harness*) : How dare you. (*Running to the far side of the room.*) Some people don't show right up to the very end.

CHARLOTTE : Stop fooling me.

RIA : There's no one fooling you.

CHARLOTTE : Well, then, you're fooling yourself. I know you, my lady. I've lived with you since the minute you were born. (*Nods to Winifred's bed.*) In there where your mother is now preparing to die.
RIA : She is not going to die. She's just sick—sick, do you hear. People get sick every day and people recover every day. That is the miracle of science. She had her operation and they cured her.

A CHEAP BUNCH OF NICE FLOWERS

CHARLOTTE : You know as well as I do . . . they opened her and they closed her again.

RIA : Which means there was nothing much wrong with her.

CHARLOTTE : Which means there was nothing much they could do.

RIA : I felt her pulse this morning, after that mopey nurse went away—she takes size ten in shoes, that nurse does—her pulse is all right, so is her heart, her heart is going . . . bumpety, bumpety, bump . . .

CHARLOTTE : Go in there and tell that poor woman that you're not having any baby, that you're *boasting*.

RIA : I hope it won't be still-born, or a blue baby.

CHARLOTTE : It won't be anything.

RIA : I hope it has all its toes. (*Pause.*) And faculties.

CHARLOTTE : Go in and tell her the truth. Talk to her before it's too late.

RIA : My mother can wheel the baby out with me. She might grow fond of it. She's all humanity but she's frightened of babies. So am I for that matter. Always think their arms might unhinge—(*twists her own arm as if to unscrew it*) and their ears, the holes are so big, you could tip cigarette ash into a baby's ears.

CHARLOTTE : Your mother will never wheel any baby.

RIA : To parks. For day-days. La-la's. Bye-bye's. God, we'll have to smarten up on our baby talk.

CHARLOTTE : If you had any nature, you'd be in there giving the poor woman a bit of comfort.

RIA : The poor woman needs to be up and about. She wants an interest. We can take turns.

CHARLOTTE : At what?

RIA : Wheeling it. (*Pause.*) Char, will you wash napkins and (*makes face of disgust*) . . . and . . .

ACT THREE

CHARLOTTE (*taking a box down from a cupboard with candles, crucifix and starched cloth*): I have everything ready now. She got this little cloth years ago from a woman in Finglas that she did an article on.

RIA : She should be up now. We could hire a wheel chair and get her out in that sun.

CHARLOTTE : Do you want to kill her before her time?

RIA : I know where you can hire wheel chairs. In Winetavern Street.

[*Charlotte takes a horn rosary which is hanging from a nail on the wall.*]

CHARLOTTE : She'll need these for comfort.

RIA : Since I got her those "pink pills for pale people" she's a different woman, deny it if you can.

CHARLOTTE : Rouge. Dollin' her up with rouge instead of talking to the woman.

RIA : Well, what's wrong with rouge? You've got to keep up your looks. She's only forty-nine, she's too old, I grant you, for anything *exciting*, but she could be quite an attractive grandmother.

CHARLOTTE : I might as well be talkin' to the wall.

RIA : You've got to wear rouge and keep pretty and think tall. I read that in a book—*think tall*. (*She straightens herself up.*) Crikey, it's kicking. I think it will be premature. I have that feeling. I want no pain, I want, what's it, twilight sleep about seven days before the pain begins.

CHARLOTTE : I carry this place on my shoulders.

RIA : Char, isn't "twilight sleep" a magnificent name? (*Squeezing an orange.*) She'll like this. I wish we had ice to pop in it. We'll have to get a fridge to make ice for her drinks.

CHARLOTTE : Ice is no good to her or that either.
(*Pointing to orange.*)

RIA : Yes, it is. She needs a squeezed orange, her gums are bleeding. I noticed them this morning when I washed her teeth. "Blood on Your Brush Spells Danger", says so on the bus, in an advertisement for toothpaste. Well, we don't want danger her, we want to avert danger and that's what we're doing. (*She holds the glass of orange up to the light.*)

CHARLOTTE : You're averting nothing, only making bad things worse.

RIA (*going towards sick room with orange*) : It also says on the bus, "Please do not expectorate". I bet you've expectorated on a bus, Char. Oh, she's calling . . . mummy. (*Runs to cross screen into sick room.*)

CHARLOTTE (*rushes over and draws her back*) : Leave her asleep when she is asleep.

RIA : This evening we're going to get this room back to the way it was. Take away all those old sick things, bed-pans and things. And books and geraniums and . . .

CHARLOTTE : We'll do nothing of the sort. Her dying wishes will be respected.

RIA : Dying wishes. How dare you?

CHARLOTTE : Yes, she's dying *now*, this very minute.

RIA : So that's what you want. Wishful thinking. You want her head. It's her jewellery. You always had your eye on those gold bangles. (*Crossing screen.*) As a matter of fact I must put them on her, they'll cheer her up.

[*Madeline comes out.*]

MADELINE : She's asleep now. I drew the curtains.

ACT THREE

[*As Madeline comes out Ria goes in. She opens a drawer, takes out three or four bracelets and slips them on to her mother's wrist. Winifred is asleep. Madeline is looking at Charlotte's face in outer room.*]

MADELINE : You're crying.

CHARLOTTE (*through her nose*) : It's the sun . . . in my eyes. (*Getting straw bag which Ria used as a hat earlier on.*) Come on, we can get a few bottles out while she's asleep. Give me a hand.

[*Ria is in the sick room, gazing at her mother.*]

RIA : Doesn't she look pretty . . . asleep. Quiet. No arguments. No insults.

CHARLOTTE : Help with these bottles. (*She fills the basket as noiselessly as possible and says "Sssh" to Madeline every other minute.*)

[*Ria has now taken a perfume spray in her hand and is puffing perfume all over the room.*]

RIA : She'll love this when she wakens up. (*Covering glass of orange juice with saucer.*) Don't anyone touch that drink, it's hers. Pure fruit juice with Vitamin D. D?

[*Ria then exits to outer room and as she does Budd Connor enters from street door.*]

BUDD : Hello. How is she today? Any better?

[*Ria goes over and kisses him and smiling, she points to her stomach.*]

A CHEAP BUNCH OF NICE FLOWERS

RIA : It's moving . . . it kicked me.

BUDD : Little bastard. How's Winifred?

RIA : She's fine. She told me I changed the split to th' other side of my hair and to change it back because it doesn't suit me. Does it suit me?

BUDD (*kisses the top of her head*) : Lovely.

RIA : Does blue suit me?

BUDD (*absently as he bites some apple from the skin*) : M'm . . . m'm.

RIA : I feel more tranquil since the baby. I act more tranquil, don't I?

BUDD : I dreamed about your mother last night . . . about that day we went out the country to pick elderberries for the wine.

RIA : D'you remember she had no matches and she had to chain-smoke all the time . . . and Charlotte Russe trying to go to the lavatory when you weren't looking, and I bit your hand. We were in love with each other even then.

BUDD : It's only like yesterday . . . She was so fit. (*He moves towards the sick room.*)

RIA : When are we going to get my ring . . . there's a place on O'Connell Street where they give you a jam dish free, with it.

BUDD : We'll take the jam dish. I must tell her a funny story I heard coming up on the bus. A fella was dancing last night, hangin' in over his partner and the Legion of Mary tipped him off for "Lurchin'." "Lurchin'," says he, "is what you do when you can't dance but have to rely on your partner to drag you around." (*He exits to sick room.*)

RIA : I'll have twilight sleep when my time comes.

[*As he goes into the sick room Charlotte comes out with the two bags of bottles.*]

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CHARLOTTE : We got some o' them anyhow. Here, Ria, you take them up to Slattery's, they wouldn't insult you in that dress. (*sharper*) And take it off the minute you come home. You don't need it.

RIA : Who'd believe it, a street named after my grandfather and we haven't a two shilling piece between us?

CHARLOTTE : There's no street named after him. Now get it straight, there's a plaque up where he was born. Did you tell Budd Connor the truth?

RIA : He's light about me, he even wanted us to get married quietly this week or next.

CHARLOTTE : You're tellin' the two of them when you come back, do you hear me? Now go on. There's ten shillings' worth of empties there. Get a sup of brandy and a jar of calf's foot jelly.

[*As Ria exits, Charlotte says:*]

Nothing in her stomach for two days. She's just fadin' away. Fadin' off the face of th' earth. On a summer's day. Happy is the bride that the sun shines on . . . happy is the corpse that the rain . . .

[*Ria overhears this from doorway and turns back to say:*]

RIA : I hope the sun shines on my wedding day.

[*Budd is telling the "Lurching" story to Winifred.*]

(*sings*) "My love stole a diamond, a beautiful diamond, to give, to give to me."

CHARLOTTE : Go on . . . the sooner you go, the sooner you'll be back.

[*Charlotte tidies up and sighs to herself.*

In the sick room Madeline and Budd are standing near the bed.]

WINIFRED (*putting out her hands to reach to Budd*): You're here. You never miss a day, do you?

BUDD: "You're lurchin'," said the man to my friend. "Lurchin'," says my friend, "is what . . .

WINIFRED: I'm sorry about all this, I'm sorry, Budd.

BUDD: Shut up.

WINIFRED: I meant to die on my feet, I swore I would. (*Gropes to get something from table.*) Those brochures came . . . at last.

BUDD: We'll go for Christmas.

WINIFRED: Don't you start being a hypocrite.

[*Budd winks at Madeline.*]

MADELINE: I know a poem, Mrs. Hennessey—will I recite it for you?

[*Budd nods his head and Madeline recites before Winifred can answer.*]

Oft I had heard of Lucy Gray
And when I crossed the wild,
I chanced to see at break of day
That solitary child.
No mate, no comrade Lucy knew,
She dwelt on a wide moor,
The sweetest thing that ever . . .

WINIFRED (*sitting up*): Water? Where is it?

[*Madeline suddenly stops reciting.*]

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MADELINE : What, Mrs. Hennessey?

BUDD : A drink of water.

MADELINE : Oh here, Mrs. Hennessey, Ria made this for you.

[*Madeline hands glass to Budd who holds it to Winifred's lips.*]

When me Granny had 'flu she was always askin' for water. Barley water.

WINIFRED : And I like barley juice. "The grey juice of the barley will see us through the night," that's what you used to say, Budd! You say nothing like that now, you're all . . . different. No one makes me laugh any more.

BUDD : Winifred! Winifred!

[*Charlotte, who has been bustling around, says:*]

CHARLOTTE : God's sake cheer the woman up. (*Nudges Madeline.*) Sing or something.

MADELINE : Will I go on with the poem?

CHARLOTTE : Do something. Skip.

[*Madeline skips to rhyme.*]

MADELINE : A tisket
 A tasket
 A brown
 And yellow
 Basket.

WINIFRED (*to Budd*) : So you're going to marry her.

BUDD : I suppose so.

WINIFRED : She'll want a virgin suite.

BUDD : Shush . . .

WINIFRED : There's no shush about it . . . I always

hated marriage. When I was young and being proposed to, I used to scorn it.

MADELINE : What colour hair had you, Mrs. Hennessey?

WINIFRED : Red. Red hair. (*to Budd*) Yes, I thought it was something to be proud of, it was part of my creed, free love for women and free meat for the poor.

BUDD : And what's wrong with that?

WINIFRED : I haven't said there's anything wrong with that. We're not talking about wrongs; we're talking about intention, the things people set out to do . . . I bet you wanted to be an athlete, Budd.

BUDD : I wanted to be a priest.

WINIFRED : Well, then, an athletic priest . . . doing cross-country runs and following the hounds. You poor bastard, you'll have monogrammed cutlery and frilled pillowslips and . . . Ria.

BUDD : You sweet bitter bastard of a woman, you can't lie there and make fun of me like that. You did it, you, you . . . I wouldn't have set foot in this house only for you, wooing me with harshness, buying boots for me and saying they were left here by some other man. You . . . (*He cannot find a word hard enough to kill her with.*)

WINIFRED : They were good boots, Budd.

BUDD : Is that all you have to say . . . (*Leans over her.*) Say something that I can listen to.

WINIFRED : Go away. Stop looking into my dead eyes.

[*Budd Connor rushes out past the screen, takes bottle from his pocket and drinks from it, wipes his mouth with his hand.*]

BUDD : Jesus. 'Twas bad before but 'tis nothing to

ACT THREE

this. (*Takes aspirins from his pocket, swallows two, splashes his face with water.*) What did she say was printed on God's back door—"Please do not ask for help as refusal often causes offence." Why me? "I'm afraid the Lord has not chosen you, Budd, I'm afraid it's Martha, Budd, I'm told there's a free jam dish, Budd." God damn it, all I wanted was to be the village idiot . . .

CHARLOTTE (*at bedside*) : Anything you'd like, love?

WINIFRED : Flowers. The colours of sweet pea are in my head.

CHARLOTTE (*to Budd*) : Get her some sweet pea.

[*Budd looks as if he is in a trance.*]

(*going over and whispering*) Come on, you can feel sorry for yourself at the graveyard.

MADELINE : I'll see if there's any in the garden . . . there was rhubarb early on.

[*The Professor has entered a moment earlier from the street. He looks at Madeline, looks around, spots a milk jug, drinks, then goes to sick room.*]

PROFESSOR : Winifred, it's a lovely day . . . a lovely autumn day. You want to hurry on now and get out there in the sunshine. (*He sits down and tilts his hat over his eyes as the sun is streaming in the window.*]

[*Madeline re-enters through street door and walks towards sick room.*]

Charlotte and Budd have been standing near the bed, mumbling to each other.]

A CHEAP BUNCH OF NICE FLOWERS

CHARLOTTE : She wants a drop of brandy . . . Ria has gone for it.

BUDD : I only had whiskey anyhow.

MADELINE : There's no flowers out there, but me Mammy said she'd gather a bunch from our garden.

CHARLOTTE (*to Professor*) : I thought you put down bulbs. I thought you did that much.

MADELINE : Weeds. All weeds.

WINIFRED (*in a rambling voice*) : Weeds.

PROFESSOR : There's no suppressin' of weeds. You might as well be idle as trying to keep weeds down. You get weeds nowadays that are immune to weed-killer.

[*Pause.*]

Oh, I brought her these. (*He takes a bag of grapes from his pocket and puts them on the bed.*) We needn't be dependin' on the Metropolitan Water Board much longer either, there's a spring in the garden . . . I found it today. It's been there all this time . . . save the water rates.

BUDD (*to Winifred*) : I *am* here, child. I *am* holding your hand.

[*Enter Ria.*]

RIA (*loudly*) : God, it's like a morgue. (*to Charlotte*) They didn't want to pay me, they said some of those bottles are over ten years old . . . they said the shapes are out of date.

CHARLOTTE (*going over to Ria*) : She's much weaker. Where's the brandy?

RIA : I didn't get it . . . I got her a present instead. I got her something she's not expecting . . . It's nicer when you get something you're not expecting.

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(*Going to bedside.*) Ma, I got you a present. Will I open it for you, it's something exciting. (*Ria opens it and reveals three sets of false finger nails and some nail varnish.*)

WINIFRED : What is it?

RIA : False finger nails, they're to put on over your own nails . . . make you glamorous . . . fit them on. Match your bangles.

BUDD and Tcch . . . tcch . . . tcch . . .

CHARLOTTE :

[*Charlotte goes over to Budd and talks to him. He searches in breast pocket, finds ten shilling note which he gives to her. She rushes out.*]

RIA : Fit them on, Ma.

WINIFRED : I can't . . . the weeds, the weeds . . .

[*The Professor eats a grape, and, holding the stone in his hand, says to whoever might listen:*]

PROFESSOR : I'm going to sow this, it might become a vine, one day.

RIA (*to Budd*) : That one in the chemist's says to me, "When are you having your baby, Miss Hennessey?" *Miss Hennessey.*

BUDD (*to Winifred*) : It's coming now . . . Charlotte is getting it. Hush, child.

[*There is a tap on the door and Madeline goes to answer it.*]

MADELINE : Oh, it's Donal, with the flowers, from me Mammy. (*Takes them and closes door gently.*) Thanks, Donal.

[*Madeline carries the flowers over and lays them on the bed. Winifred picks them up and smells them. Charlotte rushes in with a small parcel.*]

RIA : What's that?

CHARLOTTE (*to Winifred*) : I have it for you, love . . .

MADELINE (*feeling the shape of the parcel*) : I know, it's calf's foot jelly for invalids.

CHARLOTTE (*through her nose*) : It isn't calf's foot jelly for invalids.

[*Charlotte unwraps parcel; it is a small bottle of brandy. She holds it to Winifred's lips while Winifred sips.*]

RIA : Brandy will go to her head. Drink always does.

CHARLOTE : Brandy will not go to her head.

RIA (*to Charlotte*) : She looks funny . . . her eyes look funny.

PROFESSOR : I wouldn't give her long. It always happens like this, the faculties come back for a little while and then they go . . . altogether.

CHARLOTTE (*to Ria*) : Just come over and whisper into her ear. Come on, Ria, you promised.

RIA : I will in a minute.

[*Shoneen Tracy enters street door, crosses to screen and taps on it as though it were a door, then enters sick room.*]

My God, look what the cat brought in. God, you've grown a beard and everything, you look colossal!

SHONEEN : I came to see your Mammy. How is she?

ACT THREE

RIA (*goes to bedside, says to her mother*): Shoneen is here.

[*Winifred whispers something and Ria stoops to hear what it is.*]

(*to Shoneen*) She says hello. I'll tell her you have a beard, give her a laugh. (*to Winifred*) He has a beard now. (*to Shoneen*) She says *well, wear*. Where are those flowers? She wants to smell them again.

CHARLOTTE (*carrying the flowers which she has put into a vase*): She has a great craving for a smell. (*Shakes head sadly at Ria.*)

RIA (*to Budd who still has his hand clasped in Winifred's*): Hold my hand, I want to tell you something. (*He has one hand clasped in Winifred's, and the other on Winifred's forehead, holding a damp cloth to it.*)

BUDD (*to Ria*): I have only two hands, Ria.

SHONEEN: Have you the candles ready and a crucifix?

[*Pause.*]

I told Father Aloysius to call up, did he come?

CHARLOTTE: He was here. (*She puts beads into Winifred's hand.*)

SHONEEN: Did she see him? What did she say to him?

RIA: Ask her.

[*Ria is spraying perfume, then she goes to bedside and opens drawers of bedside table.*]

Anything else you'd like, Ma? (*Finds travel*

brochure, reads:) "Czechoslovakia is expecting you. What will you see? The *Spartaklade*—a parade of youth and beauty, happiness and life. Hundreds of thousands of gymnasts will fill the Spartaklade stadium . . . (*Scans down the page.*) dark pine woods and blue mountain rivers . . ." We'll go in the winter, the off season, snow on the pine trees. (*urgent voice*) We'll *all* go, Ma, do you know I heard the funniest thing the other day, some travel agency put an advertisement . . .

[*While she is talking Charlotte is opening a window, saying:)*

CHARLOTTE : Stuffy.

[*Shoneen is kneeling down, the Professor is taking off his hat. Budd is bending over the sick woman.*]

BUDD (*song*) : Good night and joy be with you all.

[*Ria goes on without even noticing them.*]

RIA : . . . in a magazine to say that it's cheaper for two to travel. Cheaper for a man to take his wife. You know the more people that travel from the same family the cheaper it is. Didn't some cartoonist (*says this word very affectedly*) draw a cartoon of a maharajah getting off an aeroplane with about eighty-seven wives and the air hostess congratulating him on all the money he had saved. *We'll* all go and we'll save . . .

BUDD (*in an urgent voice*) : Charlotte, Charlotte.

[*Charlotte rushes over from window and bends*

ACT THREE

down to listen to Winifred's heart, then she lifts Winifred's hand and feels her pulse.]

Should we call the doctor or something?

CHARLOTTE : There's no need to . . . it's all over.

RIA : What's all over?

CHARLOTTE : Kneel down.

SHONEEN (*recites while kneeling*) : Oh my God I am heartily sorry for my sins and I *detest* them above every other evil because they displease Thee my God . . .

[The cuckoo clock begins to cuckoo as Ria rushes over and begins to shake her mother.]

RIA : I said that woman was sick and needed a proper doctor and none of you would listen. (*She shakes her mother.*) Ma, Ma, I want you, I want to tell you something . . . Ma, Ma, someone, do something.

[Ria lifts her mother's body and shakes it hysterically.]

CHARLOTTE : Jesus and Mary.

BUDD : Come away, Ria, come away, child . . .

[Budd tries to drag her away, and turning to him she says:]

RIA : I thought she was bluffing. So did you. So did everyone. We all thought she was making it up. Oh Budd, if I was bluffing, would you still . . . ?

[Ria tries to slip into his arms, but he is weeping over Winifred's body.]

A CHEAP BUNCH OF NICE FLOWERS

BUDD : Winifred . . . Winifred . . .

[Ria is pulling frantically at his jacket.]

RIA : Would you, would you, would you?

[Shoneen has lit a candle and is still praying, Madeline and the Professor are on their knees crying, Ria is tugging at Budd's coat, saying:]

Would you, would you . . .

Charlotte tries to draw her away and is still trying when the curtain falls.

Curtain

PLAYS OF THE YEAR

Plays of the Year was launched in 1949. So far twenty-six volumes have appeared, chosen and edited by J. C. Trewin. It is regretted that Volumes 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 10 are now out of print.

VOLUME 1 1948-49

COCKPIT by BRIDGET BOLAND
FAMILY PORTRAIT by LENORE COFFEE and W. JOYCE COWAN
THE HAPPIEST DAYS OF YOUR LIFE by JOHN DIGHTON
THE MISER by MOLIERE, adapted by MILES MALLESON
THE PARAGON by ROLAND and MICHAEL PERTWEE
DON'T LISTEN LADIES! by SACHA GUITRY, adapted by STEPHEN POWYS and GUY BOLTON

VOLUME 2 1949

ANN VERONICA by RONALD GOW, based on the novel by H. G. WELLS
DARK OF THE MOON by HOWARD RICHARDSON and WILLIAM BERNEY
BLACK CHIFFON by LESLEY STORM
THE LATE EDWINA BLACK by WILLIAM DINNER and WILLIAM MORUM
THE KING OF FRIDAY'S MEN by MICHAEL MOLLOY
BEFORE THE PARTY by RODNEY ACKLAND, from a story by W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

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***TARTUFFE** by MOLIERE, adapted by MILES MALLESON
TOP OF THE LADDER by TYRONE GUTHRIE

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